The Alpine Club of Canada • Vancouver Island Section

ISLAND BUSHWHACKER

2015 ANNUAL

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VANCOUVER ISLAND SECTION

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Cover: Viewing Rugged Mountain (Photo: Valerie Wootton)

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REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

Mike Hubbard

Another year has passed and it has been a good one despite a poor skiing season on the Island last winter.

Catrin Brown organized yet another ski camp at Golden Alpine's Meadow lodge. Unfortunately she had to go to the UK for family reasons and Russ Moir and I were left to manage it. This was the first year in which we had made it mandatory to have completed an AST 1 course. It was to no avail as four of us were caught in a wind slab avalanche and were lucky to escape without injury. We did however have some fantastic skiing and thanks are due to Catrin for getting us out there.

Our Spring Banquet was well attended and held at the Royal Victoria Yacht Club. Liz Williams regaled us with an excellent presentation on her trip to Kilimanjaro and the Serengeti. We are looking forward to hearing about her latest trip to Nepal from which she has recently returned.

In May Russ Moir organized a work party on the Judge's route on Mt. Arrowsmith. The late Mr. Justice Ralph Hutchinson, after whom it was named, would be horrified to see the erosion that has taken place from overuse. We managed to achieve a remarkable amount of repair in one weekend and a bonus was the wonderful camp three of us had on the summit. Much remains to be done and I hope as many members as possible will come out for the next work party in the spring.

A new event, which I hope will become a tradition, was a week of Rock Climbing at Skaha. Based in a luxurious condo at Okanagan Falls, we had some great climbing and, for those of us who are vertically challenged, some much needed post-climbing wine in the surrounding vineyards. Thanks to Colleen Kasting for organizing us.

The Summer Camp Committee is to be once again congratulated on organizing three weeks of camp in the Cyclone Peak area just west of Lillooet Lake. A great spot and well chosen. Unfortunately the weather did not smile on us, apart that is for week two, which I was lucky enough to attend, and which was idyllic. Week three was marred by a serious accident to Diane Lyon, an Edmonton Section member, which required a helicopter evacuation from difficult terrain and thanks are due to the Camp Manager for that week, Rick Hudson, for so ably handling the situation. We subsequently made a donation to the Pemberton District Search and Rescue acknowledging their tremendous help with the rescue.

The summer BBQ was held at Catrin's mountain retreat at the end of August and was blessed with calm and warm weather. The BBQ was tended with aplomb by Erich Schellhammer and we had a most congenial and pleasant evening.

In September Tak Ogasawara invited us all to a weekend at his vineyard, the South End Winery, on Quadra Island; some 30 of us attended and not only did we have a wonderful feast, but we were introduced to the challenges of the Chinese mountains and other crags pioneered by Phil Stone. Thank you, Tak, for hosting this event. It was very special.

Throughout the year the Education Chair, Harry Steiner, has run a large number of courses, many in conjunction with Island Alpine Guides. Thank you, Harry, for all your work. The social evenings on the second Thursday of the month have been full of interest and Peggy and Roger Taylor have done a great job in tracking down interesting speakers and meeting the challenges of opening the Swan Lake Nature Centre on time, which has on occasion been no mean task. Peggy and Roger also organized the Photo Contest which attracted the usual level of high quality pictures.

Mary Sanseverino has put out our monthly newsletter and always managed to find items of interest: a special thanks both to her and to Sean McIntyre who stood in for Mary during the summer months.

This year we have tried to encourage events for our up-Island members. Lindsay Elms, our Historian, put on a very interesting evening in Courtenay in November, with Lydia Bradey from New Zealand presenting on her experiences as a guide and as the first woman to summit Everest without oxygen. The following weekend, Janelle Curtis organized an evening of climbing in Nanaimo's Romper Room, which was great fun and attended by 29 of us. Thanks to you both.

The Banff Film Festival, our major fund raiser, was once

again a sellout. Congratulations to Krista Zala on the energy which she put into organizing it and making it such a success. The Island Bushwhacker Annual now equals the Alpine Club Journal in professional appearance and thanks are due to Cedric Zala and his committee for their painstaking work on its production.

The section Christmas Party was once again a delight and ably organized by Colleen Kasting. Thanks to Tom and Pam Hall for loaning us their warm and elegant house for the occasion. The Choir of St. Andrew's School sang carols for us and Reinhard Illner gave us the opportunity to sing along in both English and German to his skillfully played piano accordion. Thank you also Tom for continuing to house our Library and Archives.

Many members have led trips throughout the year: thanks to all of you. Christine Fordham has added a new incentive to Leadership with her points and awards program. Thank you for setting this up, Christine, and also for your work as our National representative. The TrailRider program has also had many outings throughout the year. Thank you, Caroline Tansley, for running this and also acting as our secretary.

In terms of ongoing projects, Chris Jensen and his hut committee are working hard on the planning for a proposed hut, most probably in the 5040 area, and we are looking forward to its shelter in the not-too-distant future.

During the year Walter Moar joined the executive as the safety coordinator; he and I have inspected the club gear and discarded one or two items which had passed their best-before date or been damaged in use. It is a pleasure to have you on board, Walter.

Our finances are in good shape thanks to Colleen's tight rein and considerable work. We have made donations to the Canadian Alpine Journal, the Vancouver Island Mountain Centre, Pemberton and District Search and Rescue, the Vancouver Island Spine Association, Phil Stone for Quadra Island Climbing and to the Vancouver Island Avalanche Centre. From the Memorial Fund we made a donation to Kristen Walsh for her work on the Mountain Fire Lookouts in Alberta and she and Mary Sanseverino rewarded us with an excellent presentation on their work at our January Social.

This is my last report as your Chair. I have enjoyed the experience but the time has come for new and younger blood to take over. Thank you to all the Executive for your hard work. Thank you particularly to Colleen Kasting for keeping our finances in such immaculate order, to Janelle Curtis for handling the membership communications so efficiently, to Martin Hofmann for his work on the website and to Robie Macdonald as our FMCBC representative.

We are fortunate to have here on the Island such a thriving club and wonderful group of friends. I look forward to continuing to see you all both in the mountains and at section activities.

VANCOUVER ISLAND

At Home and across the Border – the Youth Mountaineering Year

Nadja Steiner
With contributions from Andrew Stewart, Callum Stewart, EJ Hurst, Aila Gessinger, Sydney Gessinger, and Iain Sou

Thanks to our youth leaders and some additional adult leader support, we had a fabulous trip schedule this year. I wished I could have gone to all of them myself!

Stefan and Shanda started the year with a "Search for northern lights expedition" to Lady Lake (Mount Elma)

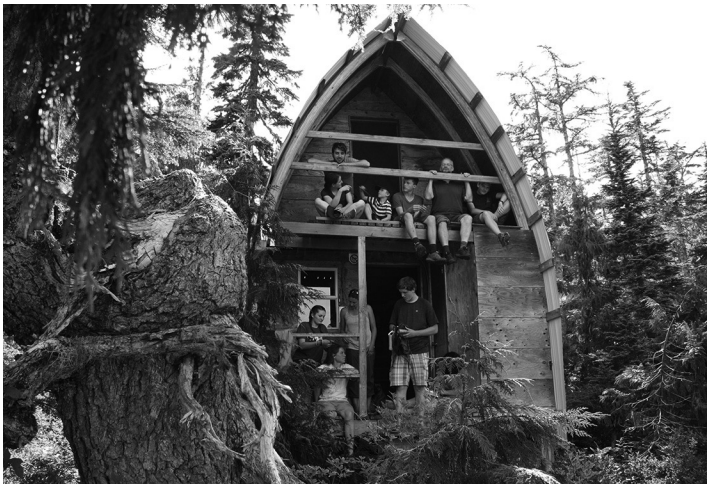
By Aila Gessinger (age 11)

Packing went on until 2 a.m. the night before expedition quinzee. After 3 hours of sleep we jumped in the car and caught the first ferry. We stopped for propane and sunglasses and Sydney and I soon fell asleep. After arriving at Mount Washington we dressed for some cold weather, packed the sled/pulk and put our skis on with our skins attached. We had a few breaks but kept our pace and arrived at camp around four and finished our quinzee around nine. We were all very cold and ready for warm bed when we realized that we forgot two mats. We improvised with Sydney sleeping in Stefan and Shanda's double sleeping bag and me in my own. Stefan and Shanda celebrated New Years with a bottle of champagne. I really wish that we brought a bottle of sparkling apple juice for Sydney and me – next time!

In the morning Sydney and I attempted to sled with the pulk, which did not work. After that we went and skinned up a hill and skied back down. When I was coming down I caught some air, my skis fell off and I had quite the face-plant. Arriving back to camp we all decided to stay another night. The next day my toes were so sore and cold, it took forever to get my boots on. When I finally did, we left. When we got to the car, Sydney and I went for a small sled session then we left the beautiful white and snowy cold mountain.

Our annual Mount Cain experience, like so many other snowy plans, had to be cancelled while Mount Cain shone in shades of brown and green.

The summer program we started with some day hikes up Mount Finlayson and Mount Work, which were enjoyed



Kludahk Trail, Meadow Cabin, top: Eric, Rebecca, Isaac, Jacob, Harry, Jared; bottom: Raven, EJ, Robyn, Finn, Su (behind the tree) (Photo: Nadja Steiner)

Kludahk Trail, Camp fire at the Wye Lake shelter. Left to right: Eric, Rebecca's feet, Andrew, Marlene, Veronique, Callum, Raven, Jacob, Jared, Finn, Nadja (Photo: Harald Steiner)

by kids, parents and dogs all the same. Our first overnight trip was to the Kludahk trail. Planned as an introduction to backpacking, the group and the weather allowed for a most relaxing weekend. Short hikes, extensive swimming, even canoeing and fabulous survival training (fire-making, shelter-building, the secret of keeping busy ...) led by Finn, who had just completed a summer adventure guiding program with West Coast Adventure College, and who had borrowed cadet (and Finn's friend) Jared. We made our base camp at Meadow Cabin and ventured from there to Wye Lake for a water and fire day (the fire was professionally drowned by Andrew, Callum and Finn at 12:00, when the fire ban came into effect on the Island), to Raven Lake for swims and water retrieval, and for a day hike to Tower Cabin. As Andrew and Callum attest, it was a great intro to backpacking, indeed:

By Andrew Stewart (age 7)

At first we went to China Beach. The water was warm. When we went up the road it was dusty. We camped on some bushes. I carried my own pack. It is red. We had lentil curry for dinner. It was so hot we went swimming every day. We roasted sausages over a fire at Wye Lake. The trail was very bumpy and we had to do a long walk. On the first night I went to bed right away because I was very tired. It was really fun. I want to go backpacking again.

By Callum Stewart (age 9)

I went to the Kludahk trail at the end of June. I really looked forward to it. We got there in our car and the road was gravely. We camped about one kilometer from where we parked. It wasn't too hard to hike, counting all the hiking we did. It was pretty sunny and warm. We stayed in a tent for two or three days. We ate soup and other stuff that came in a bag. We had to walk to Raven Lake to get our drinking water. We went swimming every day and it was fun. I carried a fair amount of stuff. We saw birds, a snake and tadpoles, I think. We saw interesting vegetation like hellebore or it might have been false hellebore. There was one other kid in mine and my brother's age named Isaac and he was nice. We brought some gear, like socks, pants, shirt, hiking pole and some other stuff. We learned how to make a fire with a flint and steel and how to make a basic shelter with a tarp. It alternated where we were each day from base camp. I don't know what my favorite part of the trip was, but it definitely wasn't the mosquitoes. I would love to do some more backpacking.

Our climbing camps this year were organized by Stefan and Shanda on Saltspring Island and EJ and Lindsay on Gabriola and good fun for all participants:

Boulders, Belaying and Bathtubs - a Kid's Climbing Weekend on Gabriola Island (EJ Hurst)

On July 25 and 26 this year, ACCVI Youth leader Lindsay organized an introduction to bouldering and climbing for youth on Gabriola Island. Lindsay has been a member of the youth group for many years and now at 17 was ready to lead a trip with help from his adult leader and mom, EJ. New ACC members Ashlee, Alena and Lyra enjoyed the beach and set up camp while Lindsay and EJ set up the top rope climbs. With the very dry summer and seldom frequented climbs, we were concerned about rock fall so didn't want anyone inexperienced on or under the cliff. All went well, although very long slings were required for the set up. On Saturday a.m., we headed to the Spring Beach boulders, where Lindsay showed proper spotting and climbing techniques. The unique sandstone topped with harder mud rock makes amazing shapes to climb on and through. These boulders are in the water at high tide so we worked our way along the beach, turning back just in time for a bit of wading to get back to our cars. After lunch and a swim at the campground, we demonstrated a top rope set-up on a small hill in the camp ground and practiced belaying and rappelling. Then it was time for the climbs. Alena and Lyra turned out to be little mountain goats which was good as the climbs are short but challenging. They handled a vertical crack just fine by employing some bridging techniques and they also did some nice face climbing. Lindsay managed the group well and made sure everyone was wearing their helmets, belaying properly and using correct communication. That evening after dinner, we sat on the

Bouldering Gabriola's beaches. Left to right are Elena Sales, EJ Hurst and Lindsay Richards. (Photo: Ashlee Sales)

Summit of Peak 6100 above Appleton Pass, Mt Olympus in the back: Left to right: Evelyn, Cees, Finn, Iain.(Photo: Nadja Steiner)

point and had the treat of fireworks in the Nanaimo Harbour for the Bathtub Races weekend. Early Sunday, we saw the bathtubs passing on their way up the coast. The campground manager was on hand with binoculars so that we could see the tiny boats just in front of the huge waves they were making. Sunday, we had a change-over of climbers and were joined by Rebecca and Eric McWilliams who are not members but were interested in seeing what an outing is like. They had never climbed outdoors before so enjoyed the difference of climbing on rock. Despite there being a little rain that weekend (probably the only rain we had all summer) the climbs stayed dry enough that we were able to have a good time.

Our big trip this year led us across the border into the Olympic Mountains. Probably everyone at one time or another has admired the Olympic Mountain skyline when driving into Victoria. So it was about time to accept that visual invitation. Youth leader Finn and myself had checked out the Appleton – Cat Basin high traverse the summer before and deemed it suitable. Organization was a bit more challenging for groups of more than 6 people, since the Park allows only designated camp sites for larger groups. This caused the distances to be a bit longer than originally planned. I wouldn't have needed to worry though, since the group signing up for the trip consisted of our most experienced and longest standing youth members in the group. All had participated in the Youth Mountaineering Camp in 2013.

They smoothly managed the strenuous first afternoon of 8.5 miles (13.7 km) and 3150 feet (960 m) elevation gain from The Seven-Lakes Basin trail head to Appleton Pass. We had planned a day of rest and exploration for the next day, but everyone was keen to check out the ridgeline scramble to Peak 6100, which turned out to be a great trip with amazing weather. From the summit we could easily spot the bright orange T-shirt Cees had hung up to mark our camp. Cees and Finn collected mountain goat wool from the bushes on the way, for future fly tying adventures. We even spotted a mountain goat far away in the area, once we were back at camp. Refueled with well filtered water from the little lake with scarily reduced water level, Finn came up with a whole bunch of excellent first aid scenarios, which both the pretend injured and pretend first aiders enjoyed and learned from. Even the deer got interested and came for a visit into our camp.

The next day with well filled water bottles, and shouldered packs, we were ready to enjoy the view in all directions along the High Traverse to Cat Basin. The group was so comfortable in the occasionally rough terrain that we moved along at an excellent pace and contained our hunger all the way to Swimming Bear Lake. There we enjoyed a well-deserved long rest, even with a swim in the icy water. Finn, Cees and Evelyn ventured around the lake to catch photogenic frogs with their sun hats. Thanks to our experience from the year before, we saved us the extra tour up the ridge, and hiked across a small pass through beautifully colored terrain towards Heart Lake. That would have been our preferred campsite, but it was not designated for groups and turned out to be closed for restoration, anyway. Hence we had to lose precious elevation and make our way down to the Sol Duc Park group site. The fabulous campsite made up somewhat for the frustration. Finn and Iain explored the creek bed, and myself, Arno and Cees went for a dip under the waterfall.

The option of a much faster and easier hike out along the Sol Duc River, instead of retracing our steps back to Heart Lake and enjoying the high divide trail with amazing views of Mount Olympus, caused some discussion but we decided to follow the original plan. The hike back up turned out to be faster than expected and in the end all youth were speeding ahead, singing (even Iain!), and chatting. Unfortunately the dry summer had dried up the vegetation, including the blue berries, and had driven away the bears. Also, the air was a bit smoky from the wild fires in the Park. The way down was nice and easy; however, Finn ended up having some issues with his hiking boots and we had to slow down. We had lunch at Deer Lake, where Finn's fishing enthusiasm got awakened yet again. Lacking a rod, he improvised one from a hiking pole and crafted a fly with a tea bag and some mountain goat wool. Lots of cheers erupted

Lunch break on the High Divide, Olympic Mountains. Left to right: Arno, Derek, Evelyn, Iain, Finn, Cees. (Photo: Nadja Steiner)

when he in fact caught a small trout with it. Nonetheless, he decided this would be the last hiking trip without his fly rod. As usual, the last bit of the trail stretched and stretched, but we made it out with ample time for a nice and relaxing soak in the Sol Duc Hot Springs. Waiting for the ferry we celebrated a truly excellent trip with a fabulous dinner at a Michael's in Port Angeles.

Iain, one of our most active youth leaders, had diligently gone through his copy of Island Alpine and convinced his dad to explore the hike to Mount Cobb as a potential group destination. Unfortunately, the Vancouver Island bush was not in their favour and they instead put on a Castlecrag Mountain circumnavigation.

For the last trip of the season Iain was keen on leading a somewhat more technical trip and Stefan agreed to be his supporting adult leader. The time was September and the aim was Triple Peak.

Triple Peak

By Sydney Gessinger, age 9

The Triple Peak trail starts with a log bridge crossing a river. We had big backpacks full of food, camping stuff and climbing gear. After crossing the waterfalls we arrived at the alpine lake. It felt good to go swimming on a hot, sunny day - the cold water almost took our breath away. We lay on the rocks to dry off. We saved weight by bringing the tent fly only for 4 people. The next day we started using the rope when we got to the slippery glacier. From there we climbed through tight gullies and bushes to the top. After having lunch we signed the book and looked at the smurfs who live on the summit. We rappelled down the mountain. After rushing back we missed the last ferry home to Salt Spring and slept in the Crofton parking lot. Monday morning we caught the first ferry and got back to school on time.

While they had a great trip with lots of good experiences, they, as well as many other hikers and climbers this summer, experienced the consequences of our hot summer. In many usually easy-to-hike snow-covered routes, the snow had melted and left behind a debris of loose rock, much harder to navigate. While helmets were already mandatory before, now it is clear why. A loosened rock hit Evelyn's helmet causing symptoms of a light concussion. Without a helmet, this could have been disastrous.

Triple Peak - Main Summit Bloc

By Iain Sou, age 17

The beginning of the hike is nice and treed with a makeshift bridge out of a fallen log. There are some parts that are quite technical but have fixed ropes. After a couple of hours you emerge from the trees and hike a bit to a lake that's quite pretty and very cold. You make your way up to the left side on a muddy slippery trail to where we camped, marked by a nice big boulder where one could bivy if needed. As there is not a lot of water, just a couple of little tarns, I would recommend filling up at the lake. The next day we hiked a bit to a little ice field, where we roped up and the leaders walked up and belayed the others. It was a little sketchy in hindsight; maybe an ice axe or some ice screws would have made it more comfortable for the leaders. Then we started climbing (well, more like walking), then scrambling up. Some areas were exposed and most parts required a rope. Lots of trees and bushes and lots and lots of rock-fall. It was about three pitches. Some parts were hard for the belayer because of low visibility due to all of the bush and the angle of the slope. At the top it got a bit harder climbing and the bush disappeared, so some nuts and cams were needed. On the way down there were some bushy rappels and not a lot of standing room as we had a big group. There was already quite a bit of gear left behind so we didn't need to leave much of our own behind. On the way down there was again a lot of rock-fall and after we got back to camp we packed up and hiked out. It was a manageable two-day hike with kids but we pushed the limits. Three days would have been nicer and less rushed and would be what I would budget if I did it again with or without kids. Overall it was a great trip and would love to do it again.

Triple Peak: Sydney, Aila, Evelyn (Photo: Stefan Gessinger)

Our packed program this year was only possible because a whole bunch of youth and parents stepped up to put forward ideas and lead trips. I would like to thank youth leaders Finn, Iain and Lindsay, as well as all their supporting adults, for putting in the effort and time in making the trips a great experience for other kids and youth as well as all the parents.

Participants in one or more trips: Iain, Evelyn, and Derek Sou; Lindsay and Mike Richards; EJ Hurst; Nadja, Finn and Harry Steiner; Su and Raven Castle; Marlene Jolisant; Veronique de Sephibus; Arno and Cees Dirks; Stefan, Aila and Sydney Gessinger; Sofia Pickstone; Shanda Lembcke; Robin, Jacob and Isaac Humble; Sandy, Callum and Andrew Stewart; Rebecca and Eric McWilliams; Ashlee, Alena and Lyra Sales; Sofia Pickstone; Jared Pond

Nanaimo Lakes Notables

Roxanne Stedman
February 22 – April 19

The opportunity to finally access some hills in the Nanaimo Lakes area came about in the winter/early spring of 2015. We anticipated a bad fire season for the summer/fall of 2015 due to the small snowpack, with an end result of limited summer access. So we started tackling some new territory as the conditions were right and some of the access gates might be open.

View Towards Nanaimo Lakes Notables from Mount Buttle. (Photo: Dave Suttill)

Mount Moriarty – 1610 m
February 22
Distance: 7.3 km with 650 m ascent

Although we didn't access Mount Moriarty via Nanaimo River Road – it can be if you are lucky enough to find the gates open! It is the highest peak south of Mount Arrowsmith.

It's a long drive for a day hike from Victoria when approached from the Alberni side by Cameron Main, but with conditions as they were on that day, it was worth it. Blue skies, warm temperatures and consolidated snow made everyone happy, even old Schooner. And no bushwhacking.

We left Victoria at 7 a.m. with a 3-hour drive to the trailhead at ~956 m. Up to the ridge we went, where we were treated to beautiful views. Following the snow-covered ridgeline we gradually ascended to the summit, avoiding the steep drop offs. We enjoyed a leisurely lunch on the summit, spending an hour picking out peaks. We could see tops of the Golden Hinde and the Behinde peeking out just left of Red Pillar. There was a good view of Mount Olympus way to the south.

While enjoying some boot skiing on the way down, we kept hearing voices. We soon spotted a huge gaggle of UVIC students heading to the summit – in clumps, sprawled along the ridge line making their way to the top. There must have been about 20 of them!

We were back at the car at 3:15 and with a quick stop at the goat market for treats we were on our way home.

Participants: Dave Suttill, Sandy and Roxanne Stedman

Mount De Cosmos – 1355 m
March 3
Distance: Biked 10.8 km, hiked 25 km with 1176 m ascent

The name of the not-often-visited mountain or more correctly, sub-alpine hill, intrigued me. It was named after the eccentric Amor De Cosmos (born Bill Smith), BC's second premier (from 1872 to 1874), who according to Wikipedia had a phobia – a fear of electricity. Smith changed his name to "Amor De Cosmos" (translated as "Lover of the Universe") to pay tribute, as he said, "to what I love most... love of order, beauty, the world, the universe."

Concerned that the access gates might be closed or, if open on our way in, might be closed on our way out, we opted to start at Branch A, at the end of First Lake. The first access gate is almost always open and we sailed through that one. We parked at the pull-out on Branch A on the right side of the Nanaimo River Road. That gate was closed. The gate at Second Lake was open.

At 10 a.m. we loaded up our bikes and headed up the logging road above First Lake and up the north ridge. The road gradually got steeper and steeper. We ditched our

Bikes at Junction for Green and Gemini Mountains. (Photo: Roxanne Stedman)

bikes at ~480 m, when the road deteriorated and was too steep to continue riding or pushing. We hit snow at 610 m and from 900 m on, we were in continuous snow. The snow was sparkling in the sun. It was a beautiful hike up.

At the end of the logging road, we headed up a short gully to the summit block. The gully looked impossibly steep until we got on it and we were soon at the top marked by a repeater beacon.

Participants: Dave Suttill and Roxanne Stedman

Gemini Mountain North Peak -1505 m
March 9
Distance: Biked 36 km, Hiked 19.5 km

The twin peaks of Gemini Mountain had been beckoning us for a while – ever since the Climb The Island Challenge in 2012, when we tried to check it off the list but we just couldn't get in despite recce trips, Google Earth, Google searches and info from club members. So this was our chance. Once again, the first gate was open and so was the second gate, but what to do? We were really concerned that we had a long day ahead of us and if we were delayed, gate #2 might be closed on our return. So we reluctantly parked the car in front of gate #2 at Second Lake and again headed off on our trusty mountain bikes.

It was a long ride up the river valley; crossing the Nanaimo River, we headed south up the Green River valley. We over shot where we wanted to start hiking and had to do some backtracking but at least it was now downhill on the bikes. We started hiking at ~11:30. Through the slash, we connected to the logging road (with only one wrong turn) for Green Mountain and arrived at the Snow Bird trail sign at ~1:10. From there it was an easy uphill slog. The trail/logging road branches off to Green but our destination that day was Gemini. Dave found a good route up through the standing timber, marked with the occasional comfort flagging. We were soon in snow as we followed the ridge to the summit. We were there quite late in the day (3 p.m.) and although Gemini South looked so close we knew we had to leave it for another time. We were treated to spectacular views but we didn't linger.

Although it was a long trek back to the bikes, I enjoyed it. Looking out towards very Green Mountain and beyond made the time pass quickly. It was very tempting to try and cut off the large switchback on the logging road and head overland but one look down convinced us to stay on the road. We did manage to cut off some of the slash bush-whacking just before reaching the bikes. Back at the bikes at 6:00 p.m. and after a quick snack we were off. I thought Dave got snaffled up by some mountain beast as he was no longer behind me while I careened down the logging road but he soon came into sight after rounding a corner. The only disappointing part of the trip was when we got back to the car, the gate was still open so maybe we could have driven up!

Participants: Dave Suttill and Roxanne Stedman

Green Mountain – 1465 m
March 16
Distance: Biked 17.4km, Hiked 6 km

We had often spied the lovely green meadows of Green Mountain from the peaks above Lake Cowichan. Green Mountain was the site of a ski hill that operated from 1963 to 1984. As part of our quest to bag another peak and check out new terrain in the Nanaimo Lakes area, this former ski hill was an obvious candidate.

We brought the bikes along just in case, but this time we were going to risk it and drive on up. We sailed through the first and second gates with smiles on our face. Dave had checked Google Earth for the correct logging road branch to take (Branch K) and we had just turned up the road when we found a tree lying across it, so we were back on the bikes. The low-lying fog in the valleys and the fresh snow on the hillsides made for spectacular vistas, but it was cold.

Summit of Green Mountain, Dave Suttill and Roxanne Stedman. (Photo: Dave Suttill)

As the logging road got steeper, I got further and further behind, pushing my loaded bike up the road. Dave, who carries his gear in his pack vs. panniers, switched bikes with me, as it was just too hard pushing a loaded bike. We reached the Snow Bird sign at ~10:15 and then we were soon on snow. By 1050 m, the snow was getting a little deep. We arrived at the junction for Gemini once again but this time it was a winter wonderland. We left the bikes there and headed up the old ski road past the wilderness sign to the large open slope. There was a beautiful view back towards Butler and beyond. Above the snowy meadow, we wove our way through the trees to below the summit block where the old ski lift had operated.

We were soon on the top but it was freezing. It was too cold to hang around so we snapped a few photos and took a quick gaze at the view. The view went from nearby Mount Moriarty to far-away Mount Garibaldi and Nine Peaks. We headed part way down the summit block to have lunch in a more protected spot on the south side.

The route down was through the woods between the old ski runs at about 1300 m elevation, then through the meadow. We were soon back at the bikes at 2:00 p.m. The sun had melted most of the snow from the trees and was quickly melting off the logging road, making the riding easy. We were on our way at ~2:20 and back to the car in record time at 3:00.

As it was still early in the day we decided to take a quick drive up the valley to check out how to access Butler Peak, for our next trip.

Participants: Dave Suttill and Roxanne Stedman

Butler Peak 1465 m

April 19

Distance: 8.5 km

Butler Peak had also been on the Climb the Island Challenge but we never figured out how to successfully access it despite lots of map scouring, etc. As the logging gates had consistently been open for our past trips, as soon as the weather and our schedules cooperated we headed back to the Nanaimo Lakes area.

As per usual, bikes were loaded on the car just in case but we also brought along saws and ropes in the event we had to deal with any windfall blocking the road. Of course, being prepared resulted in no road issues on the way in.

Armed with screen shots of Butler and its surrounding logging roads, we started by heading for Second Lake. From Second Lake we headed towards Green Mountain on Branch K and kept going. Managing to find the correct spur in a south-easterly direction, we continued up. The spur initially had its usual water bars but then it got narrower and bushier with alders growing in the middle of the road which made it feel like we were bushwhacking in the Subaru. We parked at ~950 metres when it became too much for Subaru to go any further and it was getting pretty scratched up.

After we left the car at 9 a.m., we hiked along the logging road for 2.5 km before heading up the slash and through the forest to gain Butler's relatively open south ridge. Even with the patchy snow, the trail was easily followed, helped along by the occasional flag. We were on the open ridge in just over an hour. The views were spectacular and the terrain crazy easy. We were sitting on the summit twiddling our thumbs before 11 a.m. and that includes a coffee break on the way up! The patchy snow on the summit had some interesting footprints – so we were not alone! The south slope meadows of Green and Gemini contrasted beautifully with the still snow-covered north slopes of nearby Mount Buttle.

It was such a beautiful day, and with all this extra time on our hands we decided to do some exploring. After returning to the car we checked out various access points including the road to Jump Lake and beyond only to discover more locked gates with security cameras.

Later, we did manage to speak to the gate-keeper at First Lake who was filing her nails at 4:55 p.m. and itching to close the gate. As the weather improves and the May long weekend approaches, she told us, the First Lake gate gets locked at 5:00 p.m. from Sunday to Thursday and stays open until 8 p.m. on Friday and Saturday. If you get locked in behind, go the campsite and she will come and open it for you for a fee! We had just squeaked through in time. Note – times and gate opening and closing can vary.

Participants: Dave Suttill and Roxanne Stedman

Alava Bate Sanctuary Traverse

Chris Jensen
March 6 – 9

"Hey, I'm keen to head up to Alava Bate Sanctuary this weekend. You interested?"

"Yes! I'm down!"

With this handful of words between Michael Loch and I, the wheels were set in motion for a trip to climb all of the peaks around the Mount Alava/Bate Sanctuary.

I enjoy trips where you don't have to retrace your steps and had been looking for something like a watershed route that didn't require the logistics of parking a car at each end. The Sanctuary appeared to offer exactly what I was after: a continuously high alpine loop with several summits along the way. The route goes around the headwaters of two drainages: the Perry River and a major tributary of the Conuma River. A quick estimate showed the Sanctuary traverse to

be about 20 km long with 3500 m total elevation gain/loss.

The Alava Bate Sanctuary is located 13 km southeast from Tahsis, near Vancouver Island's west coast. Our planned traverse would begin in the south and move clockwise around the peaks as follows: Mount Bate (1,688 m), Little Alava (1,560 m), Mount Alava (1,621 m), Mount Grattan (1,607 m), Thumb Peak (1,627 m) and Tlupana Ridge (1,573 m). This cluster of summits is complemented by three idyllic lakes: Alava Lake, Peter Lake and "Shangri-La" Lake.

The Sanctuary sees few visitors, in part due to its reputation for being defended by a dense labyrinth of coastal jungle. This herbaceous hell provides ripe growing conditions for an abundant crop of devil's club. Such features are why this area claims a spot on the top ten list for Island bushwhacks and why some parties use a helicopter for access.

Mike and I were mentally prepared for a major thrash when we arrived at the spur road off Conuma Main. We shouldered our packs and set off down the overgrown road towards Mount Bate's southeast ridge. Our packs weren't 'light and fast' because our gear choices reflected that it was still technically winter, we didn't know what degree of rock and ice challenges lay ahead, or how long it would take to complete the traverse. This was a perfect mix of ingredients for some Island alpine adventure.

As I took those first few steps I wondered how many hours were we about to be battling the bush for. However, part of me was optimistic that a large gully I had seen might possibly save us from the bloodletting. This wide rock gash runs east/west at the southern base of Mount Bate. It started only 1 km and 150 m elevation away from where we parked. We walked down the old road for 800 m, ducked into the bush for 200 m and then popped out into the gully. That was easy! Only 20 minutes of bushwhacking.

The gully begins at about 400 m elevation and goes in a straight shot westward to over 900 m elevation. The access provided by this feature was far better than I could have hoped for. It was an almost vegetation-free ramp that was filled with well-bonded gravel and talus. It made for easy and fast traveling. We used this expressway to quickly gain more than 500 m in elevation (Note: Sandy Briggs and Torge Schueman had first tried this approach gully in January 2/3, 2005 during a winter attempt on Mount Bate).

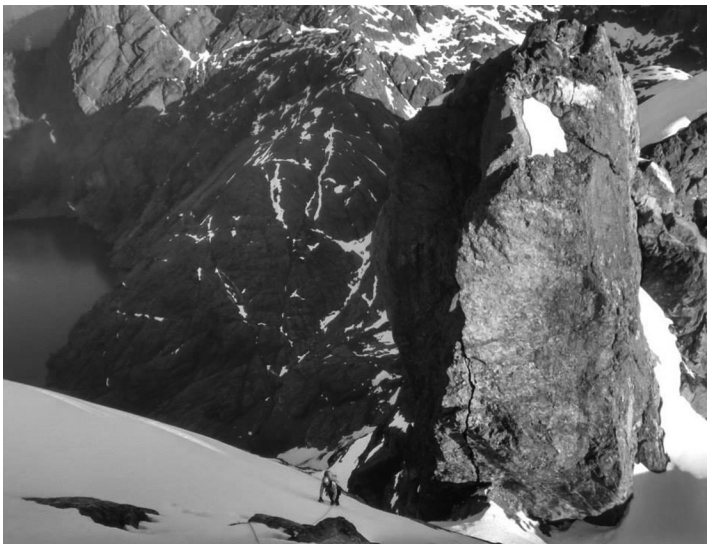
From the top of the expressway we could have grabbed bush to gain more elevation, but instead we continued west and dropped down into the next drainage. We were interested in seeing if this small valley would provide easier access to the alpine. Nope! Mike and I worked our way up a series of small waterfalls until a larger one blocked our progress. After backtracking a bit we headed into the vertical vegetation on climber's left of the waterfall. Progress was almost nonexistent; however, the profanities flowed easily. We rappelled out of the thicket and walked back downstream looking for a weakness along the 300 m high walls that stood between us and the open alpine. "How about here," I suggested. "Works for me," Mike replied.

On the east side of the creek, we began climbing up some blocky terrain between a plumb vertical rock wall on the left and a heavily vegetated wall on the right. We climbed up until the loose rock and growing exposure prompted the ropes to come out. We climbed one pitch, then another, and another. The climbing was generally around 5.6 for sections, which isn't difficult on good rock, but it's a very different experience on loose stone. My full pack pulled my balance outwards requiring me to trust undependable rock. More and more holds began to crumble under my feet and in my hands. The climbing was like a haunted house; never quite knowing when the next heart-stopping surprise was about to happen. In addition to dealing with the surficial issues, deeper concerns started to grow as the walls began to rear up steeply all around and it looked like we might soon be facing a dead end headwall.

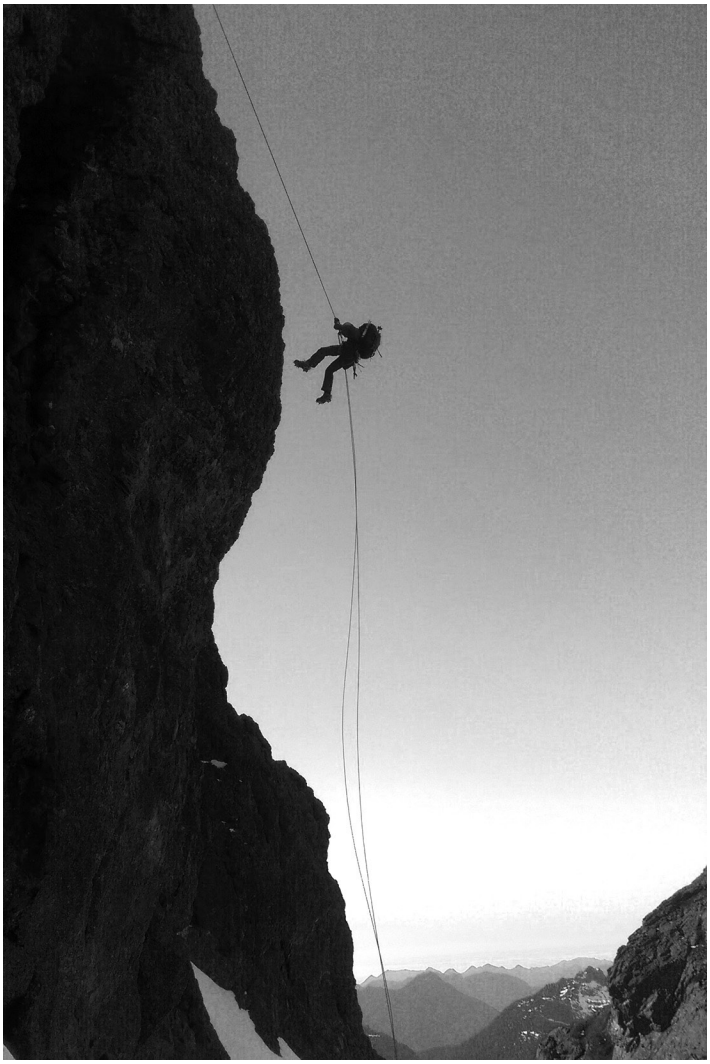
Up the fourth pitch I went hoping it would break out onto the ridge, but at the end of 60 m I still didn't know whether it would go. As I built the next anchor all I could see was ever steepening rock and doubt began to overshadow my optimism. When Mike arrived at the belay we were in good spirits, though we exchanged glances that clearly expressed our concerns. Were we about to get turned back for the second time today?

Mike ascended up some steps and out of sight. The rope stopped moving for a while. I looked at the no-go terrain that was pressing in around us and thought that we should have taken to the vegetation at the top of the gully instead. "AwwwOOOooo!!! Yeah. It goes!" yelled Mike. The shadow of doubt was gone. I scampered up the last pitch and met Mike in the sun standing by a fragrant juniper bush. Before us was the low-angled sub-alpine ridge with its reflective tarns and islands of contorted mountain hemlock.

Those 5 pitches of relatively easy, but precarious climbing turned out to be the crux of the trip. If a quicker connection can be made between the top of the gully and the open



Chris nearing the top of Mt. Bate



Mike rappelling off Mt. Bate

ridge above then Mount Bate could be day-tripped.

After the ropes were coiled we strolled upwards, keeping an eye out for gnomes or fairies in this alpine fantasy land. At 1300 m elevation we were on the last available chunk of open rock and decided to make camp early. We spread out our bivy sacks and looked up at tomorrow's objective - Mount Bate.

After a chilly night it was good to warm up as we plodded up Mount Bate's east snowfield. We gained the ridge crest to the north of the summit and all of sudden I understood why this place is called the Sanctuary. What a view! As I stood there taking in the stunning landscape I thought about how fortunate we are to enjoy these special places. At that moment I couldn't imagine a better way to spend a day of life.

We roped up below an impressive rock obelisk and started climbing a steeper pitch of snow. The almost 700 m of exposure down to Peter Lake woke me up more than the strong cup of coffee I had slurped down at camp. We were planning to climb the standard north-facing 5.5 slab pitch, but when we got up to it we found that it was covered in verglas, like the type created by an ice fog. The ice was too thin for crampons and tools, yet thick enough to shut down the friction climb. With the standard route out of shape, I swung around to the east side where the morning sun had melted portions of the verglas. I searched around looking for ice-free holds and then committed to a handful of moves. It was like playing a game of "lava" but with ice (eek not there!). This section was short-lived and I soon popped up on top. It was a lofty summit; one that gives full value for being 1,688 m high. Mike joined me and we celebrated on top of the Sanctuary's highest peak. However, our party was short-lived because we still had several more peaks to go.

We prepared a rappel off the west side of the summit. A previous rappelling accident I had about 15 years ago has been helpful for keeping me vigilant when I rappel. On this day my old accident very likely saved my bacon. As I slid down the ropes I kept a close eye on both strands below me. My eye lids peeled back as I noticed that one strand was no longer dangling and moving about. I stopped and lifted the ropes to find that one rope had been completely severed. I sat there dangling, about 2 m away from rapping off the end of the cut rope (not again!). Being on a ridge crest I'm not sure which side of the mountain I would have tumbled down, but I am sure that I would not be getting up from such a fall. Neither of us had any indication that there had been rock fall that could cut the rope. Everything seemed normal. All we could do was guess as to what happened. That old accident was a good teacher and I was extremely thankful that I had not forgotten its lesson.

We now had three ropes: a 60 m, a 40 m and a 20 m. It looked like we could get away with 40 m rappels so we re-set a station and continued to rappel down onto Mount Bate's northwest snowfield. From there we continued to descend by generally staying high to the ridge crest. Getting to the col between Mount Bate and the next peak required one more rappel and some down-climbing.

At the col we munched down lunch and peered over Peter Lake towards Mount Grattan's precipitous south face. All too soon it was time to head up again. I am not aware of a name for the next peak, which is about 1520 m high. We scrambled up this peak's open East Ridge, enjoying the grippy Karmutzen pillow lava that makes up most of the Sanctuary. From this ridge we had excellent views of Mount Bate's burley 700-m-high south face and the Tlupana Inlet.

Getting on top of this next peak was enjoyable scrambling; no more than class 3 over the odd step. There was no cairn on its small exposed summit or other signs of visitors. From this vantage point we could clearly see our next two objectives: Little Alava and Mount Alava. Down we went and then weaved along the snowy ridge. A section of awkward snice on Little Alava made for some interesting maneuvers. Mike and I clawed our way up it, tagged each other at the apex and then down-climbed the north ridge and set our course to its big brother.

We started to head up Mount Alava's south snowfield and

Northwest aspect of Mt. Bate from Little Alava Peak

noticed that we could easily access the massive north ridge without hauling our bags up and over the summit. We dropped our packs and began booting up the snow towards the upper gully. It was a stair-master session all the way up except for a few fun rock moves in the tighter section of the gulley. “Alright. Zee Zummit!” We sat in the sun feeling euphoric as our brains soaked up the well-earned dopamine. We didn’t know how far we’d make it today and were pleased that we had visited both Mount Bate and Mount Alava.

Down below the twinkling turquoise waters of Peter Lake looked to be a perfect place to make camp. As part of the descent Mike decided the best way to get down the couloir was by boot skiing. I waited for Mike at the bottom of this steep section and then watched in amazement as he cruised all the way down the tight slot making excellent turns. This extreme glissading could have been in a Warren Miller film. Mike was accelerating at almost 9.8 m/s^2 and by the time he whipped by me he was just a blur. Then the Super-G boot skier caught an edge and turned into Superman. Mount Bate made for a picturesque backdrop against this soaring alpinist. When he finally returned to earth and came to a stop it was one of those moments where before you can burst out laughing, you have to ask your buddy if he’s okay. I didn’t make it that far (sorry, Mike). I was laughing so hard I couldn’t breathe, let alone speak. Thankfully Mike was fine so I wiped the tears from my eyes and headed down to his landing site.

We retrieved our bags and then made short work of descending Mount Alava’s wide north ridge. Like the previous night, it was almost too early to make camp; however, we were satisfied with our progress, had found a top-notch camp site, and the legs weren’t eager on gaining another 600 m that day. Near Peter Lake’s outlet we found level ground for our bivy sacks and spent a long evening relaxing and savouring the peacefulness of the Sanctuary.

The next morning, we marched up the ridge leading to Mount Grattan. Once on the mountain’s west face we jumped over frozen streams as we worked our way up towards the sheer south face. Then we came to where the west face intersects the south face. Wow! It was over 500 m almost straight down to Peter Lake. This was by far the most exposed part of the trip. The airy position combined with some terrain that was moving from scrambling into climbing prompted the rope to come out. We simul-climbed for only a short distance until the ridge angle eased.

We meandered up to the top of Mount Grattan and took in the views of where we were the previous day. This area clearly does not get many visitors because since the ACC’s 2010 summer camp, only one other party had signed the register in 2013 (unfinished business since summer camp, Lindsay?). What goes up must come down so we set up a series of rappels down the east side and set off for the Sanctuary’s most distinctive feature: the Thumb. During this trip we were aiming to stick to the ridge crest as much as possible, but doing this for the Thumb looked to be quite challenging, especially climbing with our porky packs. Instead we took a steep and exposed snow bench to maneuver our way around to the east and climbed the Thumb from that side. Sitting on the tip of the Thumb is certainly a unique position.

We debated about taking the “au cheval” ridge that connects the Thumb to Thumb Peak. It looked fun though there was a questionable steep section that could take a while to work through. Having already just broken our “ridge crest” objective, we opted for efficiency and rappelled down to the snow gully below. From here it was a straightforward shot up Thumb Peak. After some more sweating we plunked ourselves down beside the summit cairn and admired the full Sanctuary, now with Shangri-La basin below.

We had been very fortunate with the weather and we continued to be surrounded by blue skies. Thumb Peak was the last major peak of this trip so unlike the other summits, on this one we decided to not rush things. Shirts came off, we leaned back in the sunshine and relished being perched above Shangri-La.

It didn’t look like we had enough daylight to make it back to the van, so once we got going again we continued at a relaxed pace and pointed ourselves towards Tlupana Ridge. We went up and over the ridge’s highpoint and began looking for dry level ground for camp. We spied two small gravel beds further down the ridge that could work. The ridge crest steepened past the point of comfortable down-climbing. We set up one rappel that dropped us off right by the gravel beds. Perfect. We had planned for long days, but the way the timing was working out it meant another early camp (darn). We sat back and watched a long colourful sunset over the Sanctuary.

It was a good thing we enjoyed the sun when we did. The next morning we awoke to low tombstone-grey clouds. This changed the character of the area from Shangri-La to Mordor. Time to go! Shortly after setting off the cloud level dropped, enveloping us in dense fog. We had no route description for how to get off of Tlupana Ridge, possibly because no one had been this way for a long time (or ever?). From our first night's camp on Mount Bate we could see across the valley and knew Tlupana Ridge was flanked by towering walls and there could be some challenging gaps along the ridge. Visibility was down to 10 m which made for challenging navigation and route finding.

While descending we came across several steep bluffs that disappeared into the ominous fog. We cautiously slinkered downwards, never knowing if we were about to encounter a huge cliff. We had been above 1000 m elevation for 16 km and now it was time to leave the open alpine. We entered the woods and made steady progress picking our way down the misty bluffs. Occasionally we were pushed a bit off the ridge crest which put us above the valley's massive cliffs. We corrected our course and continued down using the blueberry bushes for green belays. I did one short rappel that turned out wasn't needed. Beside that, it was one foot in front of the other down, down and down. The dark clouds started to release their soggy payload just as we got to valley bottom. Four hours after leaving camp we arrived back at the van. Of this time, about one and a half hours was spent in the bush, which wasn't all that bad except for the last few hundred metres. We were pleasantly surprised that we spent less than 2 hours on this trip bushwhacking.

Mike and I clinked our cold brews in celebration and grinned deeply for having climbed all of the Sanctuary's peaks. We don't know if this traverse has been completed before or whether Mount Bate and Thumb Peak have been visited in winter, but at that moment such things didn't matter. We accomplished what mattered to us: we were safe, we were happy and the experience will continue to bring smiles to our faces for a lifetime.

Trip Participants: Chris Jensen and Michael Loch

Nine Peaks – First Winter Ascent

Andreas Hinkkala
March 6 – 7

Christopher Wood is a recent recruit to the Island alpine scene and was bitten by the alpine bug only a year or so ago. In this short period Christopher is already showing great progress toward his goal of becoming a competent alpinist: he soloed Mount Septimus only a few weeks prior, which to our knowledge is the first winter ascent of this mountain. After a brief conversation about attempting Nine

Chris Wood on the summit of Nine Peaks (Photo: Andreas Hinkkala)

Peaks, we decided to find a good weekend for this winter's attempt. I had previously skied and summited Nine Peaks in May 2012, and I had attempted to hike it as a 24-hour trip in the summer of 2011. Unfortunately, on our first 24-hour attempt we only managed to reach the summit of Marjorie's Load before poor weather and exhaustion made us turn around. We initially decided to attempt Nine Peaks as a two-day ascent; however, due to the low snowpack, a good high pressure system and a full moon overhead, we felt a single day push might be to our advantage.

After an exceedingly large dinner in Campbell River, we headed to Strathcona Park and got to the parking lot at Bedwell Lake trailhead around 9:30 p.m. We started hiking just after 10:15 p.m. and we managed to get to Baby Bedwell Lake in about 45 – 50 minutes. Once we got to Bedwell Lake we took a brief seven-minute nap before the cold overtook us, which compelled us to continue moving. The only significant navigation challenge for the trip was now upon us, as we had to find the route into the Big Interior Mountain basin. Since all my previous trips in this range were during higher snow years we simply veered off from the Cream Lake Trail just above Bedwell Lake toward the basin. Our initial bushwhacking was unfruitful (the full moon does not help if you're in thick alpine shrub). Unbeknownst to us there was a trail that led right into this basin. We stumbled across a few flags and the small trail which

Big Interior Mountain from the summit of Nine Peaks (Photo: Andreas Hinkkala)

inevitably led us to our objective. Our next minor navigation concern was ascending from the basin, typically done through the small notch that leads onto the Big Interior Glacier. Under normal snow years this notch is a relatively easy snow ascent but as we got closer we started to hear a waterfall. It initially appeared to be an impassible vertical waterfall; however, as we got closer to the notch there was a small ramp to the right which led us up and onto the Big Interior Glacier.

After a brief water break, as well as putting on our crampons, we started the slow ascent to the top of Big Interior Mountain. The full moon was bright enough that we did not need our headlamps. The night sky with the full moon was truly breathtaking, as was the glittering snow which reflected the bright moonlight. We managed to summit Big Interior Mountain in about six hours from the car. At the summit we took a small break to brew up some coffee (this was desperately required by myself as even small pauses caused me to fall asleep.) After a bitterly cold few minutes of brewing water, I drank about a litre of highly potent coffee and we then continued on our way. Just as we started to descend Big Interior Mountain we started to see the first signs of dawn, and by the time we were close to Bear Pass we caught our first glimpse of the sun. We had a brief snack break at Bear Pass and also left a few items in order to lighten our gear.

Our hike/climb up to the summit of Nine Peaks was relatively uneventful. For this last section I had brought only lightweight aluminum crampons and a single aluminum mountain tool. Christopher, however, brought ice climbing tools and steel crampons. This decision definitely left me with little room for error on the few steeper and exposed sections. For the majority of the trip the snow was bullet-proof hard, although we did bring our snowshoes just in case we had any posthole issues, which thankfully we did not encounter.

Once the standard congratulations and summit photos were over we decided to head back as quickly as possible (it had taken us 11 hours to get to the summit from the vehicle). The descent from the top to the gully was definitely interesting for me using a single mountain tool and aluminum crampons. I ended up having to create hand/foot holds by kicking through the hard névé snow until we got down to the gully. Once on the glacier it was a brief descent to Bear Pass, including a few sections of glissading on our rear ends. I boiled up the last of my coffee at Bear Pass before we packed our gear and headed back toward Big Interior Mountain for the second time. It was now early afternoon and the sun shone so hot and bright that I had to wear my typical summer glacier clothing - desert hat, thin liner gloves and long shirt.

We made fairly quick work of Big Interior Mountain and once on the summit we hastily descended down the other side. Apart from the steep, exposed icy slopes that we descended, which left little room for error, the descent down from Big Interior Glacier was uneventful, apart from the fatigue that was setting in. The only navigational concern we had on the descent was to ensure we could find the trail back up to Cream Lake before nightfall. Fortunately we found the trail well before dusk and apart from hiking the Bedwell Trail we now had more or less completed the difficult parts of the trip. This also coincided with the same time that both Christopher and I started to hallucinate for brief moments due to lack of sleep. I had now been awake for over 36 hours. We both thought we were hiking with different people, and constantly had to remind ourselves who our climbing partners actually were in the moment.

Dusk came upon us just as we started descending below Baby Bedwell Lake. Despite being quite tired we kept a fairly good pace right to the end. Just a few minutes before getting back to my car I saw a McDonald's milkshake beside the trail. I was quite perplexed as to why this was there. Upon closer inspection I realized it was only a shrub!

We were very happy to see the truck at 7:30 p.m. especially since I had run out of gel packs an hour earlier. I was a little too tired to attempt the drive home; however, Christopher felt he might be okay. About 45 minutes later I woke up as Christopher was pulling the truck over to the side of

View of Nine Peaks while descending to Bear Pass (Photo: Andreas Hinkkala)

the road. He saw an alligator on the road and decided he also was not fit to drive.

Overall, the trip (21 hours) was definitely one of the more physically demanding outings that I've done, but was also one of the most rewarding ones as well. All the stars aligned to make this trip a success. I had a good partner, great weather and solid neve snow. Also hiking during a full moon as well as seeing the sunrise in the alpine was truly breathtaking.

Participants: Andreas Hinkkala and Chris Wood.

Steamboat – 1465 metres

Roxanne Stedman
April 6 – 7

Our first attempt to climb Steamboat Mountain was on October 26, 2014. A number of issues contributed to our unsuccessful summit bid, such as: insane bushwhacking, soaking wet bush, starting later than we should have, and the day being too short. We did manage to make it up past the lake and snatch some photos of the beautiful limestone formations before turning around. The summit was definitely out of reach. We were later told that Steamboat was "known to punish the most seasoned hikers…"

As the days grew longer, a small weather window presented itself in April. This time we headed up the night before and camped just off the Marion Creek logging road so we could get an early start the next day.

We were moving at 7:10 a.m. Temperature was 4º C. It was the usual bushwhack up to the lake. Dave brought clippers, which slowed him down a bit as he snipped his way up until I said if we miss the summit because of snipping…you can snip on the way back! So he stashed his trusty clippers and marked the spot with his GPS.

Roxanne Stedman on Steamboat Summit (Photo: Dave Suttill)

We arrived at the lake at ~10:20. This time there was snow everywhere. I had brought my new lightweight stove and we heated up some water for a coffee. We didn't waste any time and after a quick break we stashed the stove and we were on our way.

Crossing the lake outlet was a bit dicey. Next we should have gone over the bumps by the small tarns, but instead we did a little diversion inland. We eventually found the flags and turned back toward the creek. We made it to our October turn-around spot by the limestone karst. It was 11:30. Heading up the creek bed with its snow-covered boulders we had to do some skirting up the banks when we couldn't get by some of the big boulders in the steep sections of the creek. We headed towards the large snow gully on the right. The snow was really heavy and it got deeper and deeper as we climbed. It was really tough going, especially as the snow covered the boulders hiding the people traps. We took turns breaking trail.

Next was a very tricky and steep section of rock climbing above the first snow gully. Dave went first but I got stuck. It was icy and slippery with no good holds. As Dave was setting up a hand line for me, I managed to grab a green belay and claw my way up.

Once in the alpine, the snow covered boulders made it look like a mogul run with hidden/sunken limestone holes. This made upward travel very difficult and slow. It was like walking in moving scree – our feet kept moving/sliding back in the snow. Two steps up, one slide back.

We climbed up a rock rib to avoid another steep gully filled with deep heavy snow. Dave managed to scramble up without issue but I was stuck again. This is when long arms and legs come in handy. I tried side stepping to the left so I could grab onto some small trees but then the foot holds got smaller and the cliff below became even farther down and my fingers were frozen. While I was hanging there, my cell phone all of a sudden started binging with incoming emails as I now had reception. Dave threw me down a hand line. That was a bit scary.

As we climbed, we probed the snow with our walking sticks to check for solid ground beneath us. I fell into a snowy sink hole up to my armpits, kind of like a tree well. The more I struggled the deeper I went. Dave placed his stick across the snow supported on rocks, so I could pull myself out.

We made it to a giant slab of limestone and it was almost 3:00 p.m., our turnaround time, so I said we should call it a day. Dave said we were so close - so we continued up. Soon we were on the final summit ridge. The snow was only 6 inches deep here, so it made for easy walking. We were on top at 3:25.

The lakes below were spectacular. The scenery was very, very rugged and beautiful. Great views of Triple Peak, The

Dave Suttill Exploring Steamboat Ridge (Photo: Roxanne Stedman)

We didn't anticipate so much snow, as there had been very little snow in the alpine that winter. But March was cooler and wetter than usual, bringing snow to the mountains. We were pretty bashed up by the end of this trip.

There are some excellent write ups in previous Bushwhackers re the unique flora and geology of the area. These include Judith Holm's and Ken Wong's write up in September 2006 called "Mountain Flora on Limestone: Steamboat and 5040".

Participants: Dave Suttill and Roxanne Stedman

Cats Ears, etc. But we were freezing cold due to the wet. Our hands were frozen, making photography almost impossible. I could see there was condensation on my camera lens but there was nothing I could do about it. I could barely open the clips on my pack. Somehow I managed to send out a quick text to our partners that we would be very late getting home.

We left the top at 3:45 wearing all our gear. It was so much easier going down despite the deep heavy snow. We headed down the gullies. Navigation was a bit challenging as the GPS signal was bouncing off the canyon walls - then we spotted our footsteps by the creek. Next, we headed slightly inland back to the lake. The creek was much higher on our way down. We were at the lake at ~5 p.m. We packed up the stove and left.

The bushwhack down from the lake was harder and steeper than we remembered. Could it be that we were beat? Dave retrieved his clippers on the way down. It was getting dark. Dave slid down a cliffy section beside a huge stump down into the abyss but I went too far to right and ended up plummeting down the cliff. Dave broke my fall (thanks, Dave!). Recovering from the spill, sort of, I discovered my glasses were no longer on my face. It was pitch dark. I couldn't see and the bush was thick. I thought it was hopeless and wished Janelle was there with her magic magnifying glass bowl to help find my glasses. I was ready to give up and was already planning that Dave would have to drive home and that I would be off to the optometrist the next day. Dave got out his lights and clippers to clear the bush, as it was too messy to see, and he found them! The GPS guided us back to the bridge and we were back at the car at 9:30 p.m.

Gear: Brought harnesses, rope, ice axes and Spot. Left our crampons in the car, as snow was too soft. Should have brought one pair of warm, waterproof gloves in addition to the two pairs of basic gloves we brought. Our fingers stayed numb long after the trip – resulting in expensive upgrading to warmer, waterproof gloves.

Bryde Peak

Lindsay Elms
May 12

Last year Val and I climbed Beano Mountain via Spud Creek (near Zeballos) and this year we had to return to Spud Creek to climb one more peak in the area – Bryde Peak. Although this is not its officially name, it can be found on Google Earth. I couldn't find anyone who had been up the peak, even after talking with locals in Zeballos, so with a day free to climb, what more could I ask for – another peak to climb.

On the Monday we left Comox and drove up to Zeballos. Just a few kilometres before Zeballos we turned off the

Bryde Peak (with Beano Mountain to the right) from Grayback Peak (Photo: Valerie Wootton)

Looking down to the saddle from the summit of Bryde Peak (Photo: Valerie Wootton)

Forestry Service Road and followed the logging road towards the Old Privateer Mine. Just before the mine we then turned up Spud Creek and followed the road to the bridge washout, where we have camped several times before.

The next morning, we were up early. The spark was ignited as I had my coffee and Val her tea. With our packs on our back we crossed the river and started following the road that goes past the old mining village from the 1940's. About 2 kilometres in from the vehicle, the road forked, and this time we took the upper of the two. Last year we had taken the lower and had ended up doing some serious bushwhacking when the road petered out. The alder on the road had grown in a bit more and in a couple of places the washouts were a little more serious, but we knew where we wanted to get to this time, and an hour from the fork we were at the bottom of the gully heading up to the saddle between Bryde Peak and Beano Mountain. The only difference this time was there was no snow in the gully even though it was the same time of the year as last year's climb of Beano.

A short way up the gully there is a small rock step that we climbed and then we followed the boulder/rubble-filled gully up to the saddle. From the saddle we headed up through open old growth forest to our left and after about 200 m we began cutting around to our right, aiming towards the open slabs we had seen from Beano last year. Once on the easy slabs we strolled up to the ridge below the section we knew would be the crux.

From Beano Mountain, nearby Lukwa Mountain and Grayback Peak, I had looked at Bryde Peak from all angles and determined there was no easy way onto the summit ridge. The faces were steep and didn't appear to have any obvious options and the only feasible route appeared to be the north ridge. It looked tricky but the optimist in me always says "it will go." We stopped for a snack and a drink and after 20 minutes I got the rope out and we roped up. Ahead of us the rock was steep, blocky and treed. I climbed up a wet, muddy little crack that angled right and squeezed between a couple of rocks, aware that too much pressure might release the rocks on Val. I then managed to pull up on a tree root hanging down and got onto some solid rock above. I set up an anchor and brought Val up. Above us to the left was a vertical ladder of tree roots. I wriggled my way up it and at the top found that we had climbed the worst of the route. Again I brought Val up and then I put the rope away and we scrambled up and along the ridge towards the summit (which was further away than I thought).

As we neared the summit clouds began swirling around us, blocking the views. On the summit, which was semi-treed, we found no sign of anyone having been up there. A couple of quick photos and then Val pulled the GPS out and tagged the summit – it read 1386 m.

The descent was quick as we wanted to beat the rain that appeared to be on its way. Two rappels down off the end of the ridge put us back at the top of the slabs. We found a short cut at the bottom of the slabs, which put us about 100 m from the saddle. Down the steep, rubble-filled gully and back onto the overgrown logging road. Two and a half hours after leaving the summit we reached the vehicle, just before it began drizzling. No problem! We put the tarp up over the back of the vehicle, set up the camp chairs and pulled out a couple of nice cold drinks to celebrate another climb.

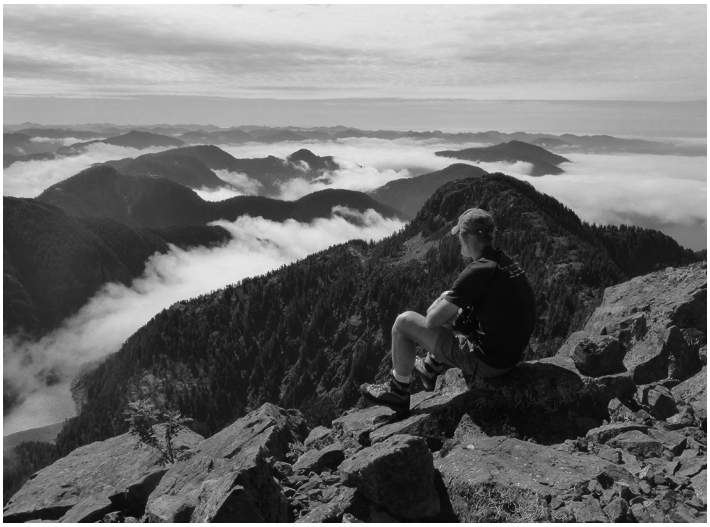
Participants: Lindsay Elms and Valerie Wootton.

T'iitsk'in Paawats: Climbing near the Thunderbird's Nest

Lindsay Elms
June 10 – 12

T'iitsk'in Paawats translates to "Thunderbird's Nest" and its location is in the traditional territory of the Uchucklesaht First Nation near Henderson Lake southwest of Port Alberni. The T'iitsk'in Paawats Protected Area was set aside in April, 2011 under provisions in the Maa-nuth Treaty and is the modern logo of the Uchucklesaht Tribe. T'iitsk'in Paawats is a highly significant cultural landscape to the Uchucklesaht, where ritual activities related to whaling and to individual healing and purification are conducted. It is comprised of numerous traditional use sites and named places, which, together, create a complete landscape of enormous cultural value. The Thunderbirds are said to live today on Tuutuuchpiika, or Thunder Mountain, one of the five named peaks surrounding the nest.

Thunderbirds are central figures in Nuu-chah-nulth mythology. They control the rain and thunderstorms. In some stories the Tootooch is one of four Thunderbirds that live on the Tuutuuchpiika and surrounding mountains. These



Chris Ruttan looking over the Thunderbird's Nest (T'iitsk'in Paawats) (Photo: Valerie Wootton)

Uchucklesaht Peak viewed from its north summit (Photo: Valerie Wootton)

Thunderbirds cause thunder and lightning, which comes from Haailik, the lizard that acts as the Thunderbird's belt. To some, the Thunderbird is believed to be a strong man that wears a bird's disguise, and then captures whales from the ocean, bringing these creatures in its talons back to the Paawats.

With special permission from the Uchucklesaht First Nations to climb the highest peak on the ridge just north of the T'iitsk'in Paawats Protected Area, Rod, Matt, Chris, Val and myself headed into Henderson Lake south of Nahmint Lake. While driving in, I heard an interesting/scary fact from Rod, one that I had always assumed Bedwell Sound was noted for. Henderson Lake has the distinction of being the wettest location in North America. Not just Canada, but North America! Data collected from the Henderson Lake fish hatchery shows that average precipitation is 6,903 mm (271.8 in), and in 1997 9,307 mm (366.4 in or 30 ft) fell, setting the all-time Canadian record. We were hoping that the recent spate of warm weather was going to continue. We didn't want a deluge to occur while we were in there. I normally would say rain, but 30 feet in one year isn't rain!

Starting at two metres above sea level we were soon contending with the thick bush associated with such a wet climate, but our excitement for the adventure ahead distracted us. Happily we climbed up the steepening bush, each of us telling stories of our recent trips and what we had planned for the summer. Our goal for the day was a saddle at 960 metres just to the south of the peak. The bush was dry, but we sweated like the proverbial pig! After five hours we reached our destination. Conditions were extremely dry, and fortunately we found a small pond that wasn't full of animal footprints. Although below us 150 metres to the southwest was a small lake, we didn't want to lose any of the valuable elevation we had gained. Tents and hammocks quickly went up and we started cooking dinner. We didn't leave Henderson Lake until noon so by now we were thirsty and hungry.

The next morning all the surrounding valleys were hidden beneath a soft layer of fluffy clouds while we above were bathing in sunshine. The ridge leading up to the summit had thick sections of bush to contend with but after one hour and twenty minutes we were sitting on the highest point, which we nicknamed Uchucklesaht Peak. This is not one of the five named mountains around the Thunderbird's Nest. There was no sign of any others having been to the top and the elders of the Uchucklesaht First Nations didn't know of any ascents as they don't usually encourage visitors. We felt honoured to be able to spent time in such a powerful area. The GPS read 1379 metres.

Slowly the cloud below dissipated and it was another sweltering day. With the whole day ahead of us, we decided to drop down off the main summit and follow the ridge north a couple of kilometres to a subsidiary summit. It was beautiful just to amble along the easy ridge enjoying the pleasure of the company and to see all the mountains that many of us were familiar with. That night we slept well, all of us believing that we would be protected by the Thunderbird.

The next day we leisurely packed up and started back down to Henderson Lake. Occasionally we had to refer to the GPS to make sure we were following the same route down that we took up, but overall the route was reasonably straightforward. It wasn't until we were just 70 metres from the lake that we missed our ascent route and got stuck climbing over old cedars that had blown down. No problem, as we could almost taste the cold beer and cider waiting for us in the cooler. Another successful trip coming to an end!

Participants: Rod Szasz, Matthew Lettington, Chris Ruttan, Lindsay Elms and Valerie Wootton.

Crest-Idsardi-Big Den Loop

Dave Suttill
June 13 – 15

Ken and George organized this trip to the mountains north of Highway 28 in Strathcona Park. It had been on the books for some time, as they were hoping to get a first ascent of the north face of Idsardi Mountain. By the time of this trip someone had beat them to it. The idea now was to head up the well-established trail to Crest Mountain, then continue on to Idsardi and over to Big Den with a possible side trip to Crown Mountain, which would have been a first. Everything beyond Crest Mountain promised to be a bushwhack.

We met at the Crest Mountain Trailhead at 11:30 a.m. after driving up from Victoria. We were not the only party starting out that day. We were surprised to find fellow ACC'er Pam Olson and partner getting ready to head out for Mount Heber via Crest Mountain. We set out across the bridge over the Drum Lake narrows just before noon. It took us a good 3 hours to get to the 1400 m level where the huge dome of Crest Mountain starts to level out and the views improve. A little further along we came upon the largest of several small lakes that dot the landscape around the summit dome. The actual summit (1558 m) was somewhat elusive and was not reached for another 2 km and a little over an hour later. We left George and Dianne here as they had not really committed themselves to our full itinerary. George also felt that accessing Crown Mountain was unlikely, and he was right. We still had 5 km left to go if we were to make camp near Idsardi Mountain that day.

The first 2 km of our route beyond the Crest Mountain summit followed its relatively open north ridge. The lower we got, the more forest and bush we had to contend with. After about an hour the ridge dropped down low enough to be fully engulfed in forest. We now lost sight of visual cues to guide us on our way. The ridge was broad enough that it was hard to discern just where its crest was and it would have been easy to get off course if we did not have the benefit of our trusty GPS devices. Even so there was occasional dissent amongst the ranks over the best route as different devices had different base maps loaded. Near the low point of the ridge there was a good-sized pond some 100 m below us to the east. This served to keep us on track for we needed to swing past it to the north in order to start up the lower slopes of Idsardi's south ridge. Once we started gaining elevation, the going got decidedly easier and soon we were in a semi-open diagonal bench system heading for the ridge top. From there it was another couple of hundred metres of open ground to a lovely spot with a tarn for water. After supper there was just time to wander off to the summit (1660 m) to enjoy the views and catch the sunset.

Our plan the next morning was to head off toward Crown Mountain (1838 m) some 5.5 km to the northeast. We hoped the series of interconnecting ridges to the north might make Crown in reach as a day trip. At the very least we were hoping to reach a high point (1711 m) about half way. We set off along the moderately challenging north ridge of Idsardi Mountain at 7:15 a.m. Things were going fine for the first kilometre, when the ridge ended with a 250 m drop. We weren't prepared for the difficulties that would have been involved to get onto the next ridge and had to turn around.

By noon we had packed up camp and were heading along Idsardi's East Ridge bound for Big Den Mountain. The entire ridge had spectacular drop-offs all along its northern escarpment. It looked like the Grand Canyon of Strathcona Park. We gazed across the deep valleys toward Crown Mountain and speculated how long it would take to approach it from this direction. After an easy 1.5 hrs, the East Ridge culminated in a minor summit (1620 m) before dropping steeply down 400 m to the saddle at the base of Big Den's north ridge. The first part of the descent went well with several open areas to cross. The lower we got, the more difficult the going. At the saddle we topped up our water supply at a bit of an elk swamp. Soon after, making our way up the steep side of Big Den's north ridge, we came across a clear stream. Again the higher we got the better the going. About half way up we found an elk trail as fine as any human constructed trail. We followed it up to the ridge to the base of Big Den, where Ken announced that this was to be our camping spot. A loud "Hurray!" came from Roxanne's direction. and there was a nice tarn for water.

Idsardi Mountain (left) from its East Ridge. Left to right: Roxanne, Ken and Dave (Photo: Dave Suttill)

After dinner we still had a good 2 hours

Elkhorn from Tarn near summit of Big Den Mountain (Photo: Roxanne Stedman)

before sunset. So off we went up the first set of bluffs to see how far we would get in an hour. We made good time over the several levels of sloping plateau and were at the elusive summit by 8 p.m. It was a magical place. There were some partially ice-filled lakes along the way. Also some spectacular patches of flowers. We had a sweeping view of the nearby mountains to the south, from Mount Filberg to Mount Colonel Foster and everything in between. The evening light made it even more spectacular. We lingered on the summit as long as we could before returning to camp. We were back just in time for sunset.

The next morning we headed back up to the summit at a more leisurely pace. We had a great time taking in the sights all over again. Ken revisited a prolific patch of flowers that kept him occupied for quite some time. However, all good things had to come to an end as we wanted to be back at camp and starting down by 1:00 p.m. The first half hour below camp was quite pleasant, following sections of elk trail here and there connecting various sections of open ridge. As we got lower the open sections got less open and more choked with swamps and windfall. After a while the ridge became drier and bushier and the temperature started to rise. It seemed the line we were trying to follow kept ending in small bluffs. Easier travel down the east slope of the ridge kept beckoning. Ken was worried that we might be faced with an even worse situation and end up in a canyon if we went that way. After some trying bushwhacking and route-finding we came to Idsardi Creek on our west. We crossed it and continued along its right bank. Ken tried to keep us on elk trails as much as possible. After a long 2 km we came to Highway 28 and our ordeal was over. Roxanne opted to hitchhike the final 4.5 km to our start point and retrieve the car. We finished off with a swim in Drum Lake before the long drive home.

Participants: Ken Wong (leader), George Butcher, Diane Bernard, Roxanne Stedman and Dave Suttill

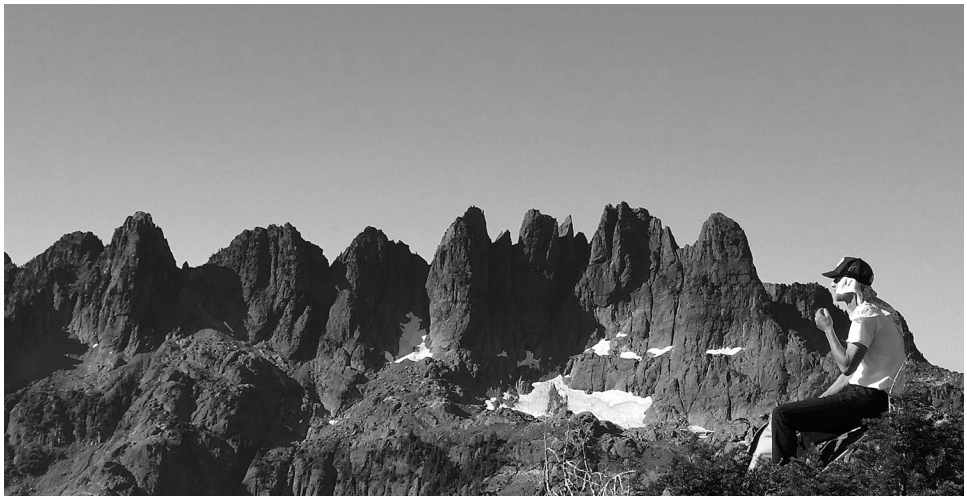
The Cats Ears Traverse

Stefan Gessinger
June 14

A few years back I hosted three German journeymen in my home on Salt Spring Island. They had been traveling the world for 3 years, as is custom in the century-old tradition of their guild. Easily recognized in their outfits resembling Amish craftsmen, they work for room and board, continuing to learn their trade from the perspective of different cultures. They set out on a tour of Salt Spring Island (knocking on some doors where I thought they might be able to find work) traveling the north end loop in a clockwise direction. After returning without having found a project, I thought of another address along the same route they might want to try. “We never go backwards,” they replied, “we only travel down new paths.”

This is what I like about traverses, the always moving forward and not returning on the path of the approach. Francis and I first met a few years ago at a trailhead in the dark of the early morning hours. He zipped off with his team, and we came within sight and shouting distance throughout the day as we both climbed parallel rock routes on the Triple Peak massif. We all met again in the middle of the night huddled under a rock trying to get off the mountain in some of the thickest fog I have ever seen.

Hailing from both coasts of Vancouver Island, and with work schedules aligning for only one free day per week, we have repeated this pattern a few times. We meet at the trailhead in the dark of the morning hour, make the most of our day and sometimes return to the car in the dark.



Francis with the Mackenzie Range backdrop

Upper lake on Triple Peak

This time, this meeting, we started out on Hwy 4 and traversed The Cats Ears via its east ridge. A fun scramble requiring a few rappels and a summit pitch brought us to The Cats Ears/Triple Peak col, from where we ascended up the ridge leading to Triple Peak via the upper lake. It's not like we purposely climbed up and over a mountain to go for a swim, but jumping in the lake on a very hot day was an awesome reward. We brewed some coffee and connected via the satellites with Shanda (who spent the day surfing in Tofino). Descending via the lake with no name on Triple Peak, we followed the waterfall route to the Triple Peak trailhead where Shanda met us with cold beers and warm Tacofino burritos.

Francis and I are well matched in speed and climbing ability and our trips tend to have a fun, competitive edge to them. Besides stopping for a swim and some snacks we moved steadily for 14 hours in second or third gear. Three days later, as has become custom, my legs were still quite sore.

Trip Participants: Stefan Gessinger, Francis Bruhwiler

Pogo Mountain

Dave Suttill
June 27

The plan was to meet at the Pogo Mountain "trailhead" where the Kennedy River joins Highway 4 for an 8:00 a.m. start on the Saturday. This meant leaving Victoria at 4:30 a.m. for some of us. When we got there we found that our start point was being used as a staging area for some SAR exercises that Brianna was participating in. We thought to ourselves it was nice to know potential rescue was close at hand if needed. Walter gave us a brief orientation talk before we headed off across the Kennedy River and downstream along an overgrown logging road. After about 2 km, we took a branch road that angled up the hill. After one switchback, we turned left and followed flagging up a rocky creek bed. After another 100 m or so we headed up the bushy embankment on the right to begin some serious bushwhacking. The first real obstacle was a 20 m sloping rocky bluff with loose vegetation for hand holds. At the top of this bluff (el 380 m) we were rewarded with a much-needed rest stop and a view. We had been hiking for an hour and a half.

After not much more than a five minute rest we bashed our way up the barely distinguishable ridge we were following. Another hour brought us to a very small but usable trickle of a creek. Now this was a big deal because we had picked the hottest day of the year (30º +) for the strenuous 1300 m scramble. Most of us had started out with around 3 litres of water so we weren't in a big rush to add to the weight we were already carrying. Besides, we were only one third of the way up and still had plenty of water. However, it was nice to know we could allow ourselves to completely run out of water before reaching this point on the way down. I put in a waypoint on my GPS for the way down in case we got off track.

The next hour was continued steep hiking in forest, avoiding moss-covered cliffy sections here and there. It was becoming apparent that the strenuousness of the hike was starting to take its toll on some of the group. We still couldn't quite see the nature of the terrain up toward the summit when we reached the 1000 m level. Two of the group, Liz and Genny, were unlikely to make it to the top that day. This is a difficult position for any leader to be in. We knew we could pick them up on the way down. They agreed to wait for our return in a comfortable spot. The rest of the group headed off with a promise of returning for them around 4 p.m. The next 150 m of vertical was quite rough with lots of bushy sections weaving around some good-sized bluffs. There was no obvious best route and we got somewhat strung out, each believing their way was best. Luckily all routes led to a small but obvious sloping meadow, where we regrouped. From here the final 300 m to the summit was in sight beyond a bit of an obstacle course of bushy gullies, open ground and climbable or avoidable bluffs. Summit fever took over, which resulted in getting separated into small groups, each travelling at its

The summit crew on Pogo Mountain. Left to right: Walter, Roxanne, Mike, Roger, Ken, Peggy and Dave. (Photo: Dave Suttill)

own pace. Roxanne and I arrived at the summit (1490 m) at 2:15 p.m. In another 20 minutes the first of the remaining group came in sight over the flat part of the summit ridge. Soon everybody was up.

The 360 degree view was spectacular. Steamboat Mountain and the Prow were 4 km to the south actually looking like its namesake. We had a clear view of the bare south side of Nine Peaks 20 km to the northwest. Even Colonel Foster, a further 40 km away, was visible. After everyone had signed the summit register and posed for the group photo, it was time to head down. Walter sent Roxanne and me ahead to make the rendezvous with Liz and Genny at 4 p.m. with instructions to start them down. He would bring up the rear to make sure everyone got off safely. We were only a few minutes late when we met up with Liz and Genny, with Mike close behind. Roxanne stashed her hiking pole in her daypack as it was as much a hindrance as a help going down through the bush. It was 5:40 p.m. by the time the five of us got to the waterhole we had found on our way up. Walter's contingent had not caught up with us yet. We knew our group would be slower so we continued on after replenishing our water supply. It took a little over half an hour to get to the sloping bluff with the viewpoint near the bottom. I could hear that Mike was with Liz and Genny was not far behind. After waiting for 10 minutes Roxanne and I continued to the bottom of the bluff and waited at the dry creek bed. Not long after we could hear the sounds of the rest of the group, who had caught up with Mike, Genny and Liz. They seemed to be having a rest stop, so rather than wait in the confines of the hot creek bed, we opted to continue another 10 minutes to the main logging road and wait, hoping for a little breeze.

We all hiked the final 2.5 km along the old logging road parallel to the Kennedy River together. There were plenty of cuts and scratches on our legs to attest to the hardships we had endured. We arrived at the SAR camp just before 8 p.m. I'm sure they were as happy to see us as we were to see them. We elected to take our vehicles and head off down the road about 5 km for a swim in the Kennedy River by an unofficial camping area. We had a nice swim and washed all the dirt and grime off. Liz had to get back to Victoria that night so she joined Roxanne and me for the drive back. The rest set up camp for the night. They were joined by Neil and Wei who drove up that afternoon.

Participants: Walter Moar (leader), Peggy Taylor, Roger Taylor, Liz Williams, Genevieve Boice, Mike Whitney, Ken Wong, Dave Suttill and Roxanne Stedman.

The Pogo Mountain trip was actually the first part of a double bill. Walter led the scheduled second hike up nearby Mount Gibson (1,332 m) via the trail to Brigade Lake the next day. Participants for that were Genevieve Boice, Peggy Taylor, Neil Han, Wei Wu, Mike Whitney, Ken Wong and Walter Moar.

Mount Colonel Foster – a Peak Traverse

Laurence Philippsen
July 3 – 5

The adventure began with a post by Andreas Hinkkala on the Facebook group page "Vancouver Island Climbing & Mountaineering" in early June. "I am looking for an experienced climbing partner for a traverse of Colonel Foster sometime at the end of June or beginning of July. I climbed Walsh's Foray a few years ago, so I'm familiar with the Foster (at least the North Tower). If interested, please private message me."

Having climbed the southeast peak of Colonel Foster many, many years ago but never getting to the main peak meant I still needed to get back there to finish the job. I couldn't have asked for a better offer and immediately replied. Luckily for me, nobody else seems to have answered the post so Andreas and I agreed to meet and go for a day of climbing on Mount Arrowsmith on June 21 to see if we would be a compatible team to try the greater challenge of Foster. We meandered up the South Summit on various routes and then up to the main summit. We felt comfortable enough with the experience that we decided to head for Foster as early as possible in hopes that our quickly melting snow on the island wouldn't be an overly negative factor in the pursuit of our goal.

Early on the morning of July 3, we met along the Inland Highway at Black Creek and headed for the Elk River Trail. It was a fairly uneventful walk up the trail to Landslide Lake in the cool morning air.

We skirted Landslide Lake, headed for Foster Lake and started up to the south col of Colonel Foster. It was almost unbelievable that we actually never walked on the snow until right at the col. When I was there in 1988 the path to the

“The goal” (view of Colonel Foster from Landslide Lake)

south col was almost completely on the snow! After setting up camp and having a quick meal it was time to get into the bivy sac to avoid being eaten by the mosquitoes.

July 4: Before the sun was up we had a quick breakfast and started up the southeast peak. We meandered up the south gullies, taking the path of least resistance till we were on the peak. After a quick snack we scrambled down awhile and then made our way up the southwest peak.

Things really got enjoyable after this. It took a couple of rappels to get down to the upper glacier and with some rather loud exclamations Andreas managed to pendulum out from the rock face and leap across a rather wide moat and drop himself onto the snow. He then walked down the slope and held the rope tight so I could cross the gap with ease. Without further ado we crossed the glacier and headed up the rock to the ridge crest. Following the rather narrow ridge, we started heading for the main peak. At this point we made our one roped pitch before the gullies to the main peak. I must confess it would have been possible to climb this section without a lead climb but my first impression of a gully that turned out to have been the easiest way up wasn’t completely favorable, and, not wanting to carry all that gear up without using it, I volunteered to climb a short pitch just for the fun of it! After this it was a fairly easy walk to the top of the main peak, where we took time for snacks, pictures and the satisfaction of achieving the main

“Down, over and up” (view from southwest peak down to the upper glacier and the route to the main peak)

goal.

From this point on we were covering ground that Andreas had previously been on and combined with the route information we had been using from Philip Stone’s “Island Alpine Select” we made short work of scrambling and a rappel down to the next col and then up to the Northeast Peak. At this point we had been climbing for twelve hours and needed to decide if we should try for the northwest peak or stop for the day. It so happened that we were standing beside a sizeable chunk of snow that was a great source of water. Looking at the northwest peak, we couldn’t see any indications of snow or water so we decided to call it a day. This turned out to be a good decision as there was no snow on the next peak and the ascent of that peak would have been done in the dark with headlamps. It was also a great bonus that there was a nicely cleared patch of ground that had enough room for two people to sleep on. As we ate dinner and admired the view it was quite amazing to see a huge plume of something that looked like smoke rising over the coast range to the east on the mainland of BC. After this it was time for some well-earned rest.

"Success!” (Peak shot with Andreas on the left and Laurence on the right)

July 5: The next morning was a repeat of the previous day, except that as the sun rose we could barely make out Kings Peak and the Elkhorn across the valley from us as a result of all the smoke that had drifted over the Island from the forest fire on the mainland. The next twelve hours were a seemingly endless repetition of looking for rappel anchors and rapping down, climbing up to the northwest peak and then doing it all over again until we got down the evacuation gully to the north col of Foster. It turned out that bergschrunds on the evacuation gully were not an issue because there was hardly any snow left! Time for a short rest to celebrate the end of the technical aspect of our trip, have a drink and a bite to eat, send a text home so our significant others knew we would be a bit late coming home and we were off the north col headed to Foster Lake. I can't speak for Andreas but I know that the walk from Landslide Lake back to the car was not the most enjoyable part of the trip. By the time we stumbled through the dark by the light of our headlamps back to the car it was 12:45 a.m. and we had been going for over nineteen hours. A quick stop beside the river where we had stashed some beverages was all we allowed ourselves before we got back into the car and went home for a well-deserved rest.

I must say this trip was one of the most rewarding and challenging alpine expeditions I have ever been a part of. I am really glad that I was able to have such an experienced and knowledgeable partner as Andreas to make the trip successful and, more importantly, safe. Here's to many more trips on this most wonderful island!

Participants: Andreas Hinkkala and Laurence Philippsen

Mount Cobb and Mount Haig-Brown from Cervus Creek

Dave Suttill
July 11 – 15

Day 1 – July 11

We rendezvoused at the Tim Horton's in Campbell River at 10 a.m. before heading off to the Lady Falls picnic area in Strathcona Park. This would be the staging area for our two day bushwhack up Cervus Creek in the not entirely unwelcome light rain that ended a record hot dry spell. There was the last minute sorting out of gear. Shortly after noon we headed up Highway 28 on foot for about 5 minutes before Tak indicated that we should head up into the forest. We were to follow the west side of Cervus Creek well back from the tangle of its steep lower section upstream from Lady Falls. This meant keeping the uphill side on our right. After about an hour it became apparent that we might be traveling in a circle. After some discussion we reviewed our progress on the GPS. We found that we had circled 600 m around a small bump in the valley floor that did not show on the 50 K map. We were heading 180 degrees back the way we came, a scant 85 m from our track of 25 minutes prior. We retraced our steps and were soon properly oriented with the creek on our left and the main hillside on our right.

It wasn't long before we stumbled on a good elk trail contouring in from our uphill side. After a pleasant half hour of really good going the trail deteriorated into increasingly swampy sections. After another hour or so the slope on our right extended down to the creek making for better walking. By 4 p.m. we realised that we had not really come across any good camping areas. We were about half way to our projected base camp and given the wetness of the bush were keen to call it a day. We passed a well drained location beside the creek with trees and no ground cover. We continued on for another 10 minutes with little prospect of improvement, so we returned and set up camp. The tarp strung up and we did our best to dry out. We were roughly even with the creek that drains the west side of Mount Filberg.

Day 2 – July 12

We were in no rush to break camp the next morning. The light drizzle had ended but the bush was soaking wet. Our projected base camp was within easy reach and once reached the only activity would be rest. No time for Mount Cobb or Mount Haig-Brown that day. We got under way at 9:00. The route was a mix of well drained animal trail where the valley bottom narrowed, to wet swampy windfall areas where it widened out. We generally followed a southerly course paralleling Cervus Creek for the next 3 hours. Then we came across the bone dry bed of Cervus Creek intersecting our direction of travel at a right angle. Tak announced that we had come as far as we needed to and would camp here. Base Camp (elevation 690 m) was set up on the other side of the creek bed. We had gained 440 m elevation since the cars.

Camp was facing the very steep east face of Elkhorn Mountain. Our first priority was to find water. A little downstream was another dry creek bed coming in from the east. Upon following up this about 50 m we came upon flowing potable water. After filling up the 10 litre water container we were in business. Next priority, set up the tents. The south side of the main creek channel had an old flood plain with suitable tent sites. About 5 m back from the forest edge was a configuration of trees that could be used for setting up the tarp should it be need it. Upon inspection it contained a large wasp nest which we avoided and the wasps reciprocated. The sun came out warming the cobbles in the 15 m wide river channel making for a dry place on which to spread out our wet clothes. We never did set up the tarp and enjoyed a pleasant afternoon getting ready for the next day's adventure.

Day 3 – July 13

We were up early the next day, but not too early. The peaks were in the clouds. At least it wasn't raining. We left camp a little after 7 a.m. and headed back to our water hole which

Looking north at Mount Cobb (right) from below the south ridge (Photo: Dave Suttill)

On the Summit of Mount Cobb; L-R: Tom, Lenka, Denise, Tak and Dave (Photo: Dave Suttill)

had retreated upstream overnight. We crossed over to the right (N) bank of the side creek and headed east up into the forest following a slight ridge up the side of the main valley. We avoided the steeper terrain down close to the side creek. We had to stay fairly close together to remain in sight of one another. Our forested ridge got steeper and steeper, maxing out around 9:15 at the 1150 m level. Then it turned southeast becoming more bushy until about the 1450 m level where it started to open out. We could once more navigate by open sight lines. Mount Cobb's south col was visible on the skyline. The ridge above was well guarded by an irregular rock band. As we got close it was apparent that a cleft in the rock, which from afar looked somewhat doubtful, contained a climbable gully. The gully was not overly steep but was loose enough in places to require caution against knocking down rocks on those below. We got to the col (1730 m) a little after 11 a.m.

The mist swirled all around us giving occasional glimpses of Mount Cobb's summit to the north. The scenery on the other side (E) of the col was spectacular. There was a turquoise blue lake a little over half a kilometre away and 200 m below. Above it were patches of snow and the remnant of a small glacier. The ridge south toward Mount Haig-Brown, lost in the clouds, was spectacular. We had a good half hour rest break before slogging the hour or so up the mix of talus, scree and rock outcrops to the summit (2031 m). We were the first group to sign the summit register this year. There are actually two summits separated by a 100 m rocky ridge. The mist gave the impression they were farther apart than that. Of course I had to go over to the northeast summit just in case it was higher. Visibility at the summit was quite limited. We did get one glimpse of Mount Filberg 2.5 km to the northeast. We started down at 1 p.m.

Our original intent was to follow the ridge from Mount Cobb over to Mount Haig-Brown. However this did not look too promising given the several pinnacles along the connecting ridge. At 2 p.m. we headed out from the col anyway to have a look. An easy half hour took us to the gap overlooking the first obstacle. What we saw looked an easy scramble.

It was what we couldn't see that had some of us worried. After some discussion we decided to head back and leave Haig-Brown for our allotted extra day. Besides, there was a chance the weather would improve the next day. Tak was keen on the possibility of taking a different route back to camp below our cleft in the rock. It was now 3:30. We could see some enticing ledges and open areas that would perhaps take us to the other side of creek valley we had followed from camp. Again, there was the possibility of hazards we could not see that might slow us down, so we elected to take the tried and true. We were back at camp by 6:30.

Day 4 – July 14

Only three of us (Tak, Lenka and Dave) still had the energy to tackle another full day of uphill bushwhack to get to Mount Haig-Brown and back. We set out at 7:20 a.m. up the left (S) bank of our side creek planning to make for some of the open sections of ridge we had seen the day before from on high. The weather was clear and sunny with just a few wisps of mist about. The first kilometre or so were just as steep as the terrain we had done the day before. In addition we had to cross two creeks coming in from the south. The second creek required care getting down the bank and up the other side. We had another 100 m of steep forest to negotiate before the ridge eased off in a southeast direction. We got to the first open area a little before 9:00. Above that the ridge broadened out quite a bit. A check of the GPS in another half hour showed we should proceed in a more easterly direction if we were to get around the north ridge coming off Ptarmigan Pinnacles. We came out on the low shoulder of that ridge a little after 10:00. We could now get glimpses of the creek directly below us. We contoured to the right around the slope of the Ptarmigan Pinnacles north ridge not really seeing out for another half kilometre when we came upon the big green pond we had seen on the valley bottom from yesterday's vantage point high on the ridge. We made this a rest stop.

After another 10 minutes along a forested watercourse parallel to the main creek we entered the lower reaches

Lenka on the ridge leading to Mount Haig-Brown (extreme right) from southwest (Photo: Dave Suttill)

of a beautiful subalpine valley. Lush vegetation was everywhere. Yellow monkey flowers lined the many small creeks flowing down the sides of the valley. The head of the valley steepened to scree leading to a col. To the left were a series of interconnecting ledges providing access to the ridge above. From further down the valley they looked quite formidable. Now that we were there the route unfolded before us and soon we were on a series of undulating benches covered in alpine vegetation heading straight for Mount Haig-Brown, now visible a kilometre to the northeast. We passed by a number of small tarns as we headed along the obvious route to Haig-Brown's rounded summit. We passed below the pinnacles that blocked our way the previous day on the ridge leading south from Mount Cobb. We picked our way up the scree and around bluffs to get to Haig-Brown's main northwest ridge for the final scramble along it to the summit (1947 m). The summit itself was somewhat uninspiring from our approach direction, being a broad domed plateau. But beyond its high point the ground drops off precipitously to the southeast over 1000 m to one of the westerly branches of the Wolf River. To the north it's an almost shear drop 400 m down to the lake we viewed from Mount Cobb's north col. We spent a good hour on top taking in the views in all directions. The sweeping panorama included Mount McBride to the southeast, the Golden Hinde to the south, El Piveto Mountain and Rambler Peak to the southwest, which the three of us had been up exactly one year earlier, and of course Elkhorn which we had climbed in 2012 directly across the Cervus Creek valley to the west.

We left the summit around 2 p.m. as afternoon cumulus clouds began to build. On the way down we had a good look at the connecting ridge to Mount Cobb. The two pinnacles which we weren't sure of before looked doable from this side so we probably could have completed the traverse from Mount Cobb. On the way back we saw a black bear on the flat part of the ridge before dropping down to the valley at the base of Ptarmigan Pinnacles. It watched us for a few minutes before taking off over the ridge. We returned pretty much the way we came and were back in camp at 6:30.

Day 5 – July 15

We left camp at 8 a.m. In an effort to avoid some wet areas we headed west to the base of the slopes of Elkhorn before heading down the valley. This wasn't altogether successful as some of the creeks coming down the slopes produced their own extensive wet areas. It was in one of these about an hour along that Tom slipped on a log and injured what we thought was his knee. It turned out he tore his calf muscle. He was still able to walk but could not carry the full weight of his pack. We were able to distribute much of his load amongst us and so continued on at a slightly reduced pace. At 11:00 we got to our half way camp from the trip in, where we took a well deserved break. On the way out we found a better route on the uphill side of where we had almost gone in a circle on the way in. By 2 p.m. we were at the highway and back at the cars 10 minutes later.

We had covered a total of 48.5 km on foot for a cumulative vertical gain of 3900 m. There had been no evidence of human use or travel anywhere up Cervus Creek. Thank you Tak for a great trip!

Participants: Tak Ogasawara (leader), Denise Ott (guest/visitor from Switzerland), Lenka Visnovska, Tom Carter and Dave Suttill

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Mount Septimus

Brett Classen
July 13 – Aug 2

So I rounded up my buddies Mark and Kyle to accompany me on a trip to what I hoped would be Argus Mountain, Mount Harmston, and The Red Pillar. Unfortunately, due to the insane fire season we had last year, the logging gates were locked and we had to amend our plans. We settled on a mission to Mount Septimus in Strathcona Park. I had previously been to Mount Tom Taylor and Big Interior Mountain, but I had yet to set foot on Septimus and was happy to have the chance to give it a go. We left Victoria at a relatively early hour but didn't reach the Buttle Lake trailhead until early afternoon. No worries though: we had a couple of post drive beers to loosen up, shouldered our heavy packs, and started making our way up to Cream Lake. The weather was great and the views were amazing. We stopped for a swim in a tarn along the way then eventually arrived at Cream Lake for another swim before dark.

Our objective was to climb the apparently 3rd class "standard route" up the south flank of Septimus as described in the new *Island Alpine Select* book. While I still believe this route may actually exist, we were not successful in finding

Scrambling up the south flanks

Rappelling back into the gully

it. We got up early Saturday morning on the first day of August to a beautiful clear sky. We had a quick breakfast and coffee then headed off towards the Septimus Glacier. The glacier was much smaller than it had been in previous years and we made it up to the west shoulder without any difficulty and without needing crampons.

From the west shoulder we walked down onto the steep loose scree slopes below the south face of Septimus. This is where things went a bit off track, as we weren't able to definitively find the "wide gully 100 m past the ridge" as described in *Island Alpine Select*. After much exploring and discussion we decided to try traveling up a narrow gully east of the main peak. The gully had a couple of chock-stones we had to scramble past and a couple of low 5th class moves. When the gully ended on a ledge, we continued up some exposed 4th class until we eventually hit the ridge leading west to the main summit. Kyle didn't feel like scrambling the last exposed section to the summit so he hung back while Mark and I continued on.

Once on the summit the views were amazing and we could see all the way the Golden Hinde and beyond. The views of Nine Peaks were especially exceptional. After high-fives and a summit party, we headed down. We descended the way we came, using one rappel to get past an exposed steep section leading back into the gully. We made it back to camp without any issues and celebrated with whiskey. Another great trip to the mountains with lots of adventure!

Participants: Brett Classen, Kyle Smith and Mark Wallace

Just off the summit of Septimus looking East towards Rousseau

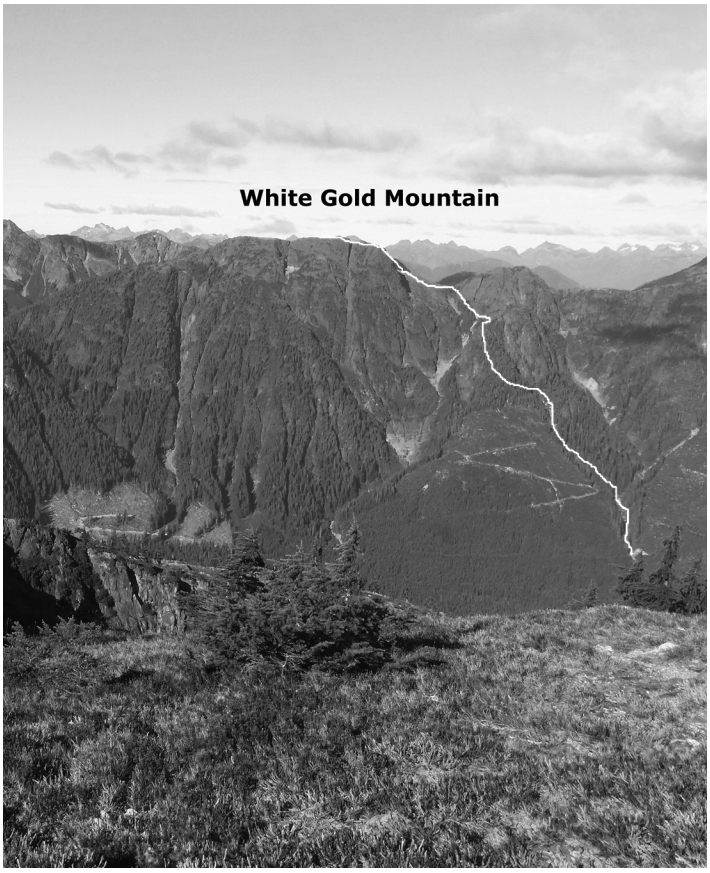
White Gold Mountain and Twaddle Peak

Lindsay Elms
August 18 – 19

It seems like there is a never-ending number of new (I call them new because I haven't been up them before) peaks for me to climb on the Island. A few days earlier I had driven up to the end of the WR79 near Twaddle Lake, which is the normal route for those climbing Victoria Peak, and climbed a peak I dubbed Victoria East Peak. (I had just spent a couple of day's peak-bagging on a ridge west of Schoen Creek and north of Sutton Peak, a ridge I called Perseid Ridge because of the Perseid meteor showers that were happening.) From the end of the road I followed the trail up onto the south ridge and then hiked the ridge towards the south face. Before reaching the face I descended a ridge to the east, dropping down to a saddle that then climbed up towards an unnamed peak (over 1500 m). This was another of those peaks that appeared to have no record of ascent and there was no sign of anyone having been there when I reached the summit. However, upon returning to my vehicle I saw another worthy objective on the west side of Twaddle Lake - another peak over 1500 m that I had no information of an ascent or that was even mentioned in any guide book or on any website. It was waiting for me to leave my footprints on it.

Opposite Twaddle Lake on the west side I found a logging road (I forget the number) that wound around to the north-east end of the peak that was my objective; however, it was taking me too far away from my objective. There were some old logging roads directly below the peak on the east side but none of them that I could drive up. I parked beside a dry creek that looked as if it might give me the best access to get me above the logged area on the east side of the peak. It was a beautiful evening sitting out listening to some music and having a beer.

The next morning, I started up the dry creek bed. After 100 m the creek narrowed and continued to narrow the higher I got. Eventually I had to get out of the creek on the left and angle up to the narrow swath of trees beside the old clear-cut. The underbrush was thick, but what is a climb without some bushwhacking? Once at the top of the cut block I was able to cut further left into more semi-open terrain and angle up what appeared from below as a treed buttress. At the top of the buttress I found that I was looking down on a section that had been hidden from view. A small gully was too steep to down-climb and the only option was to try and traverse above a steep bluff towards a small saddle on the ridge. As I angled across I found a section that I thought I could down-climb. Although it was steep, there were branches and roots that I could call upon to hang onto, and



White Gold Mountain viewed from Twaddle Peak. (Photo: Lindsay Elms)

off of. A few monkey moves and I was down. Now I just had to traverse up towards a loose gully and climb onto the ridge. I knew that if I could down-climb it, I could climb up it on the return. Once on the ridge it was another easy 20 minutes to the unmarked summit.

From the summit I was able to look around at all the peaks I had climbed but my eyes were drawn to one more peak that I hadn't been up. This peak was back across the other side of Twaddle Lake. The peak (again over 1500 m) was at the southern end of the ridge (5.5 km) south of Victoria Peak. Everyone who has hiked the South Ridge towards Victoria Peak has looked at it on their return trip and I am sure someone has followed the ridge to the peak but no one had recorded their ascent.

I descended off White Gold Mountain and easily dealt with the tricky section, only this time instead of descending the creek-bed I walked the old deactivated logging roads back down to my vehicle. That afternoon I drove back up the WR79 towards Victoria Peak, but turned off onto another road that swung around to the northwest of Twaddle Peak. Somewhere I had once heard someone refer to the peak as Twaddle Peak and I thought it a fitting name for it.

The next morning, I walked to the end of the road I was camped on and climbed up towards the northwest ridge that eventually topped out under the west face of the peak. There were no problems route-finding and an hour and a half after leaving my vehicle I was on the unmarked summit. Totally satisfied!

The Cats Ears from the South

Chris Ruttan
August 3

I have long looked at coming at The Cats Ears from the south, across the col just north of the lake up on the shoulder north of Triple Peak. I'm not aware of any name for that lake but it's one of my favourite spots in the area and I thought a person could use a camp there to make a day trip of summiting The Cats Ears. With that in mind I hiked up there in July with my grandson Jason and Jim Raper to take a run at doing just that. Jason would stay back at the lake while JR and I would look to make the climb. We went after it July 7 but it was not to be, due to a fairly stiff down-climb in the first notch along the long jagged ridge to the summit. While Jim waited at the notch, I dropped my pack and continued along the ridge to try and get a sense of how much farther and how involved the traverse would be, but I only made it to the top of the first major bump before I was faced with a serious obstacle. Besides that, I could see the summit was at least an hour away if all went well and it didn't look as though it was going to go well. I returned to where Jim waited and we retraced our hike up with just one detour while I did a little exploring, looking for pretty rocks and stuff. I would be back.

On August 2, my grandson Jason and I were back camped again at the lake up on the shoulder and I was set to take another run at the peak the next day. To get down to the col between Triple Peak and The Cats Ears is fairly easy but there are few options. From the outflow of the lake you take a slowly descending line towards the col, following handy rock ledges and letting the lay of the ledges guide you around the face till you see a route through the gathering shrubbery that takes you to a minor cliff, the first you will have to down-climb. It's not too hard and there are a couple of sporty options. Continue to follow the faint creek over a ledge for a green belay to easy rock; then you kind of just have to thrash your way down through the bush or move descender's right over to open rock that has to be down-climbed or rappelled. From there it's an easy hike to the col.

The col is brushy and narrow but not difficult, and you soon have to start thrashing through the real brush to make your way up to an open scree fan at the base of a creek gorge on the face of the steep slope you have to climb to find your way up to the more open meadows above. Looking at the rock walls from the scree fan, I chose to scramble straight up just ascender's right of the water-course. Then I traversed left to get into the creek bed and began to climb up following the creek for maybe 40 metres till I came to a wall about 25 feet tall, wet and smooth. This was the first of

Looking back to summit on return

a series of cliff bands I had been on before when JR and I had come up this way. I headed off to climber's left, bashing up through the undergrowth till I came to slightly more open ground and finally into a steep meadow. This meadow led up to the base of a rock slope that had an interesting sort of staircase. I took it to scramble up, then off that and onto a steep (but still climbable) slab. That brought me into a gravelly corner where I could continue up to a down-slope slab just climber's left of the top of the corner. By traversing left on that slab, I made it up to easier ground and was able to hike up to the top of that southernmost end of the long running spine of the ridge. A little further on and I was climbing down the first notch that had stopped my friend JR on our earlier attempt.

Once I was down there I moved on to my last furthest point where I once again confirmed that you cannot just follow along the ridge. I had to find a way down into the next deep col to continue on. I came back a little and climbed down the east face onto very steep down-sloping, gravelly slabs and worked around to the left. There I found a vertical drop, and nowhere to hang a rappel line, so it was back to the ridge line. I dropped over the west side and was able to carefully climb down to a nasty bit of a drop (about 7 feet) to what looked to be a way around the obstacle. So I lowered off and, after a bit of a bushwhack, discovered I could get into the col from there. I scrambled up the next high point on the ridge, only to be stymied again by a "knife-edge arete" of unstable rock. So I dropped off to the east onto steep heather ledges and I managed to work my way around to the ridge line again, where I let myself down ten feet or so to the next col. Now I was faced with a rock wall with very few features, serious exposure and no way to protect. On my east hand a gully dropped straight down, dizzying to look at and scoured clean of vegetation, but on the west was a very steep gully choked with all kinds of shrubbery. But if I descended that way could I find a way out of it?

I started down and thankfully the brush didn't let up, so I could keep going till I found a bit of a ledge. Here I got out of the gully and began an ascending traverse of the face, working carefully along ledges and in and out of gullies till I reached a major gully that looked as if I could use it to regain the ridge. Once through that, I was indeed back on

Looking back from summit over route

the ridge proper and I could see that what I had thought was the summit was just another peak on the ridge and I still had a ways to go. I glanced at my watch – 11 a.m. – one more hour till my turnaround time and yet more nasty ridge climbing.

I wasn't about to give up now so I pushed on scrambling along the ridge in and out of ever more notches and reclimbs, not knowing if I would finally come up against that unclimbable step that so often you find on this kind of route. By the time I made it to the actual summit I was taken by surprise not to see a further high point along the ridge, and I turned to look back to see if I hadn't maybe just been dreaming the whole thing. No, it was real and it was 11:30 a.m.

There was no summit log and I had a long way to go back so I took a few photos, had a quick lunch then set about on the return trip. I retraced most of the route but, that said, I did find a couple of the steep drops (that I had avoided by skirting around on the way out) that I could climb from this side and that saved me some bushwhacking and a bit of time. I was back in sight of the lake where Jason and I were camped by 2 p.m., our agreed time for him to start watching for me, and I used my whistle to give a series of signals that I was on my way. I used the rappel slings that JR and I had left in the creek to get down to the scree fan, so I was down quickly. Then across the col and back up the slope and across to the outflow of the lake, where I stopped for a quick swim. Then back to camp for another swim and dinner, by which time it was 5 p.m. I had left camp that morning at 6:10 a.m.

The Cats Ears from the summit

I don't recommend this route to bag The Cats Ears unless you are really into a challenging game but rather as a way to reach the slopes for exploring and hiking around on the east face. The col is pretty easy and once you get up out of the bush, there's lots of terrain to check out. Jason and I cut out a nice trail up to the lake where we camped, so it's now easy to continue on from the first lake for an easy approach to the col.

Participants: Chris Ruttan and Jason Painchaud

Lone Wolf Mountain and Area Peaks

Lindsay Elms
September 13

Located in the remote southwest corner of Strathcona Park, next to the Megin/Talbot Addition, is a rarely climbed peak – Lone Wolf Mountain. Lone Wolf Mountain was the last official named peak in Strathcona Provincial Park that I needed to climb to complete them all. It is a project that has been going on for a number of years, but I am not the only one with this goal in mind. A few months earlier one other person had also completed all the peaks in the park - Darren Wilman – however, Darren didn't finish off with Lone Wolf Mountain, as he, Alanna Theoret, and Stu Crabbe had climbed this peak back in June 2007 while traversing the ridges towards Scimitar Peak. Darren had finished the project off with Abco Mountain and Mariner Mountain, two peaks Val, Wille Scott and I had climbed a few weeks earlier. On the summit of Lone Wolf, Darren, unbeknownst to me, had left a little fitting memento – a small brass wolf to grace the lonely summit. As well as the wolf, Darren had left a little summit register, but that was not all that was up there. At some point surveyors had reached the summit and left a brass bolt cemented to the rock. I have yet to find out who that was and when, but these were the only other ascents of the peak that I knew of.

From our camp at the twin lakes below Lone Wolf Mountain, we angled up to an obvious bump that we had to go over as there was no way around. Once over the bump we scrambled up heather ramps to a buttress and then climbed around it to the right. A few scrambly moves, but nothing too tricky. Just before the summit we had to deke down through some bush and then up a gully, which brought us out just below the summit. It was a beautiful day and the views into Strathcona Park were unrestricted. In all directions were mountains after mountains and there weren't many of them that I hadn't climbed. On the way back down to camp there was a gnarly-looking gendarme made of conglomerate rock that Rod, Val and I just couldn't resist climbing.

"Lone wolf"!

September 14

Above our camp to the west were several unclimbed/unnamed peaks that were on our agenda to climb while in the area. From camp we scrambled up to a notch between two peaks we dubbed Two Wolf Mountain North and South. We dropped our packs and crawled through several metres of thick bush before we popped out onto some nice rock, which we scrambled up to the summit of the north peak. There was no sign of any previous ascent. Back down to

Lone Wolf Mountain

Two Wolf Mountain north-south

our packs and then up to the south peak, which also had no sign of any one having been up there. Off to the south were two other summits that we wanted to climb but first we had to get off the peak we were on. Just below the summit on the south ridge I found a good anchor and set up a rappel. At the bottom of the rappel we scrambled down to a small notch and saw that it would be quicker (and easier) to do one more rappel down off the ridge and onto the talus slope below, which we could then traverse across towards our next objective. We scrambled across the talus and then up to a small bump on the ridge, where we had lunch.

After lunch Val and I tried to get off the end of the ridge but found it too steep and the rock too unstable, so we found a way back down onto the talus and took the route that Rod had taken towards our peak. After an hour of travel, we were at the base of the north ridge but it didn't look very appealing. We knew there was nothing around on the east face so we were hoping that we would find something on the west face or we could find a way around to the south ridge and maybe find a weakness up it. Traversing under the west face was steep but we found a route which angled around and up. Finally, we saw a line of weakness up the west face, which we followed, and in 15 minutes we were sitting on the summit of another unclimbed peak. Rod offered the name Akhami Peak which is Japanese for wolf. We took a close look at the south ridge of the next peak to the south, and although it looked possible, we decided it would be time-consuming and require a lot of rope-work. We decided to leave it until tomorrow and have a closer look at the southeast ridge. We descended the route we climbed and traversed back under the west face to the ridge, where we found an alternate route back to camp, which was definitely quicker than traversing back across the talus towards Two Wolf Mountain.

September 15

The next morning it was obvious the weather was turning and that we wouldn't have a lot of time before it would begin raining. After one false start Rod decided to just scramble around and leave Val and me to make an attempt on the peak which we called Lupus Spire – Lupus being Latin

Lupus Spire

for wolf. To reach an obvious ramp leading towards the southeast ridge we first had to negotiate about 30 metres of thick vertical bush. We were glad that the bush was well secured to whatever was under the thin layer of soil but we still cursed when our ski-poles hooked on the bushes behind us. Once above this section it was just a matter of scrambling towards our intended ridge. Although the ridge looked steep, it was shorter than the north ridge, but the very top of the ridge looked a little blank. Maybe we could find a way around it hidden from our view.

We scrambled up to a small notch at the base of the ridge, put our harnesses and helmets on, and I coiled the rope over my shoulders. The rock was steep but nice and firm. We gradually made our way up and at one point had to deke around on the south side of the ridge. Below us was a heather gully that, if we could get into, would take us very close to the summit, but it wasn't easy to get into. We decided to stay on the ridge and see where it would take us. We managed another 20–30 metres but now it was starting to snow lightly which was making the rock wet and slippery. After looking up and seeing what was left, we decided to head down, as the clouds were starting to swirl in and visibility diminish. We figured we were only 60 metres from the top but we were satisfied with what we had accomplished and it was time to head home. Two rappels got us back to our packs and then we had to scramble down and across to the vertical bush section. Although we got a few showers, it didn't start to pour until a few minutes after we got to our tents. Although we hadn't reached the summit of the last peak, I think we made the right decision to descend, as we had to spend the next 36 hours in our tents sitting out bad weather before we could come out.

Participants: Rod Szasz, Lindsay Elms and Valerie Wootton.

The Perfect Window to Take the Crown

Ken Wong
September 20 – 22

I planned to climb Crown Mountain from the south as an extension of the traverse of Crest, Idsardi and Big Den Mountain in June. However, the big drop at Idsardi's west ridge stopped us cold. After surviving the rafting trip down the Tatshenshini - Alsek River in August, the unfinished business of the Crown became our top priority; however other fun activities filled my September. At last I found a window of opportunity around the third weekend. The forecast was rain before Sunday afternoon and then mixed sun and cloud until Tuesday morning. I mobilized the troops and headed up-Island early Sunday morning in the rain.

After wasting an hour driving back and forth looking for the South Fork Main logging road, we parked at the start of its overgrown SF900 branch. The rain pounded on the car roof while we ate our lunch. At 1:30 p.m., the rain stopped and the sun came out to steam up our surroundings. We put on our packs and got thoroughly soaked bashing through the wet alders.

Before the trip, Roxanne was told that a day trip to the Crown is possible. She was pretty keen on that! Not true – I ruled that out after reading Martin Smith's 2008 description in the Island Bushwhacker Annual of his three-day trip! However, to make things more interesting for Roxanne, we would go in on the ridge west of Crowned Creek and return on the ridge east of Crowned Creek, doing a loop. As SF900 leveled, it became a badly eroded narrow path with treacherous wet rocky sections interspersed with carpet of Lake's slipperycap mushrooms (*Suillus lakei*). Fifteen minutes of slipping and cursing later, we came across a rotten rock slide, at which point we crawled up towards the

Big foot (Photo: Ken Wong)

The twin peaks of Crown Mountain (Photo: Ken Wong)

ridge. After several hours of continuous slogging up the steep forest, which included needing to hold on with the pick of the ice axe, we descended to a shady pool. Unfortunately, it was too wet to camp there. We continued on and found a flat area above the second pool. It was five hours since we left the cars. I set my bivy sack in between fallen trees while some others erected their tents after rearranging the landscape. We cooked dinner by the light of our headlamps. This was definitely not a day trip for us. My loop plan was shelved too. Better the devil you know. It was freezing at night but the shade of the towering trees kept frost from forming over me.

I did not sleep much inside my coffin as I had too much soup and tea before going to bed. At 6 a.m. I yelled out the wakeup call. We were on our way at 7:45 a.m. but I soon paused to admire a couple of beautiful bear's-head (*Hericium abietis*) mushrooms which resembled miniature frozen waterfalls growing on rotten logs. We stopped again at a tree guarding the path, with a root system just like the big foot of a Sasquatch. An hour and a half later, we reached the sub-alpine, dotted with tarns which would have made much better campsites with superior views. There were also many choice porcini (*Boletus edulis*) and *Leccinum* mushrooms. We could see our objective, Crown Mountain, at 11 a.m. The mountain was bare except for three tiny patches of snow that lingered just below the saddle between its twin peaks. According to BC Geographical Names, in Price Ellison's report of 1910 relating to Strathcona Park, he mentions that the west peak of this mountain was named "McBride" and the east peak "Ellison"; however, neither name was proposed for adoption.

We went down the boulder-filled slope below the west peak and discovered that the slope was actually a remnant ice field or glacier. We bypassed the saddle. Mike and Roxanne found a short loose narrow gully below the east peak and I followed. George and Diane took a wide detour farther to the east. The top of the gully opened up to the summit ridge. We scrambled up a little airy section to emerge at the top of Crown Mountain just before 2 p.m. The view to the south was marvelous. The rugged mountains of Cervus Creek and Elk River Valleys rose above the sheer cliff faces of Idsardi and Big Den. This is the view from where the idea was formed to create Strathcona Park. However, I have to confess, I thought the view south from Big Den Mountain was grander. We departed after 20 minutes. Down and down we forced our tired feet forward, arriving back at camp at 7 p.m., too late to keep going. After another three and a half hours the next morning, we arrived back to the cars. Rain began at the top of SF900. We hit the weather window right on! I went home to cook up my bag full of *Suillus lakei*.

Participants: Diane Bernard, George Butcher, Roxanne Stedman, Mike Whitney and Ken Wong

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Victoria Peak

Tim Turay
September 25 – 27

I knew putting on a trip for the end of September was iffy. As we started getting closer to the day, the weather was looking really nasty and I thought for sure I was going to have to call it off. I thought, let's just give it one more day and see. Well, someone sacrificed a herd of goats because of all of sudden the weekend was going to be sunny and warm!!! Giddy up!

A last-minute cancellation of a trip participant due to a baby saw Chris join our group, which consisted of Jonathan, David, Roxanne and me. After a flurry of emails, everything was set and we meet at the Tim Horton's in Campbell River. The drive to the trailhead along Victoria Main on the way in and White River Main on the way out is straightforward. We stopped the vehicles at the end of WR381 about 2 hours from Campbell River. The end of WR381 is far up the mountain now, way higher than WR380, so make sure to take WR381. The walk into the campsite from the cars was steep and very bushy and with heavy packs was a good grunt; it took us just over an hour to get to our campsite knoll.

At the knoll we were greeted with amazing views of Warden and Victoria and thankfully, due to all the rain, some nice tarns full of water. We quickly set up camp and everyone started to eat dinner. Jonathan and Chris decided to try a new boil-in-the-bag dinner and quickly regretted it, Roxanne with her own dehydrated meal was the envy of the group. Bacon in the alpine!! Now that's yummy! With darkness falling at 7:30 p.m. at this time of the year it doesn't leave much time to sit around and after a quick plan of attack, we decided we would make a go for Warden in the morning. Reveille would be at 5 a.m. for a 6 a.m. departure, as we wanted to make good use of our available daylight.

That night we had off-and-on showers. Jonathan got punished for bringing a bivy but managed to stay dry. I didn't

Summit shot: Roxanne Stedman, Jonathan Bell , Tim Turay, David Suttill and Chris George

think anything of the rain but this precipitation would force us to turn back on Warden 150 metres below the summit. What should have been an easy scramble turned into a no-go with all the light snow and verglas covering all the hand holds. We ended up enjoying the amazing views from up there but eventually we had to head back down, saddened but still excited about tomorrow's attempt on Victoria.

This gave us a bit of time to lounge around and enjoy the fantastic views of the area, relax and have a nice slow dinner before we turned in.

The next day we left camp for Victoria Peak at 5 a.m. David "I can find my way anywhere" Suttill led the way and within a couple of hours we were below the rock face, ready for our push up onto the southwest ridge. We carefully made our way onto the ridge, trying not to dislodge any of the loose rocks on our fellow climbers, or losing our footing on the many frozen rocks. As we were climbing up, finding hand holds was tricky since some of them were just rocks frozen to each other but would come apart once a bit of force was applied to them.

Once we gained the ridge we went over to the other side and enjoyed the view of Victoria waking up to morning sunshine. So much more to go, this was going to be fun!!

After a quick break, we headed down and contoured as best we could. Here we decided to take the lower traverse over to the 5th class step. This was a mistake as it resulted in some serious bushwhacking with exposure. Do yourself a favour and take the higher traverse (the hidden gully) as this is a much nicer route.

Once we got to the 5th class step we decided that everyone would like to be belayed up the step, so Jonathan took the lead and then belayed us all up. It's about a 10 foot low 5th class climb. As a non-expert rock climber I didn't find this to be overwhelming; there is some good exposure but the climbing itself is straightforward and being belayed takes away a lot of the apprehension.

With the crux of the adventure out of the way we proceeded to make our way up the face. The fresh snow was nice but provided very little in safety as it hadn't consolidated yet and everything underneath was still loose. Most of the cairns could be seen through the snow and helped guide us to the top, which we reached at 11:45 a.m. With cameras clicking and mouths being fed, everyone sat back and enjoyed the amazing views. An almost bluebird sky added to the amazing atmosphere.

Leaving the summit almost an hour later, we made excellent time and soon enough we were at the 5th class step. Rather than down-climb we decided to rappel down. Jonathan set up a bomber rappel station and soon enough we were all down and making our way to the scree slope. There was still a bit of snow slope/glacier and with bright sun, we easily filled our water bottles with some amazing water. In a little while from here we were at the top of the south ridge, roughly two hours from the summit. Here we had one last break and enjoyed the great views and gave our feet a break.

Rather than rope up to get off the ridge, we made our way down through the loose rocks unto the scree fields below. Thankfully everyone took their time and no screaming "ROCK" was necessary. It was nice to leave the rope in the bag and not rope up, as this saved us a bunch of time, which was really needed in order to make it to the vehicles before dark. The last charge to base camp felt like it took forever. No matter how long we glided down the rock/scree field our camp was still so far away. Eventually we made it into the woods and before we started to go up to our campsite we came across the largest condom we had ever seen! No not really, it was in fact the remains of a weather balloon with the transponder attached to it. No one had seen one before, so coming across this in the middle of nowhere was pretty neat.

A quick jaunt brought us to our camp, where we quickly packed up our things, hoping to get to the vehicles before the sun disappeared. Thankfully the bush-bash to the vehicles only took 45 minutes but it was exhausting, as everyone was slipping and sliding and holding on for dear life to every green anchor around.

On the drive to Sayward Junction we came across a group of elk who decided to cross in front of us. After a minute or so they made their way off the road and along we went. At Campbell River I took the old Island Highway home to Courtenay, while the rest of the group motored down to Victoria. What a great trip in the mountains with a great group of people!!

Participants: Chris George (IQ 2), Jonathan Bell (4), David Suttill (6), Roxanne Stedman (6) and Tim Turay (5)

2015 PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

Alpine Summer Activity Winner

Summer in the Bugaboos

Photo: Chris Istace

Alpine Winter Activity Winner

Climbing Bow Falls with Skis

Photo: Chris Jensen

Humour Winner

Half in the Bag

Photo: Chris George

Mountain Scenery Winner

Alpamayo at Sunset

Photo: Chris Jensen

Nature Winner

Barred Owl

Photo: Elena Sales

Vancouver Island Winner

Triple Peak Sunrise

Photo: Patrick Horsfield

MAINLAND

Canoeing the Thomsen River, Banks Island, Northwest Territories

Graham Maddocks

June 23 – July 7, 2014

At 72 degrees of latitude the Thomsen River on Banks Island is the most northerly navigable river in the world. The flow originates in the centre of Banks Island and flows into the Arctic Ocean at Mercy Bay, the flow of the river being entirely snow melt. By July the river is too shallow to navigate. The area encompasses Aulavik National Park, which has its headquarters in Inuvik. The park is famed for the largest concentration of muskoxen in the world, about half of the world's population. It is estimated there are about 70,000 of these huge animals living on Banks Island and we did see about 500 of them, in herds of 15 or 20 animals. Often we could see up to 8 herds at a time. The park rangers, who were all aboriginals from this area, said that we were the only group to have visited the park this year.

I made the canoe trip in June 2014, with a river-canoe outfitting company that had never made the trip before and wanted to include it on their itinerary. There were 3 guides and 5 clients. We flew in from Inuvik with collapsible canoes made in Norway. These canoes were a plastic skin stretched over an aluminium frame. The company had never used them before and they were very flimsy and obviously would not tolerate any abuse, and we had no backup plan.

It was a three-and-a-half-hour flight in a Twin Otter to a refuelling stop in Sachs Harbour, the only community on Banks Island. We had selected a landing spot on the river bank and were a little dismayed when the pilot made only a cursory over-flight before deciding that the ground was too soft. We later learned that the company had landed there before and the Twin Otter had sunk in and was unable to take off; the same fate had happened to the backup Twin Otter sent to rescue them. It had taken an elaborate helicopter fuel leapfrogging scheme to eventually fly in some planks and extract the two planes.

The site he eventually landed at had a prepared fuel dump of several barrels of fuel. These fuel drums could have been left sitting on the dry ground, but federal environmental regulations required them to be in a plastic spill container. This container was full of snowmelt water and the barrels sat in it rusting away. The pilot said that it would render the fuel useless, and he also said that transportation costs made each 50 gallon drum worth more than $4000. The aviation company had cut our payload to 2200 pounds, which meant we had to repack and dump a lot of our gear, including the wine. The next day, while we were trying to assemble the canoes for the first time from the instructions, the pilot returned with a 3000-pound payload of fuel drums, which left us perplexed and a little peeved at the thought of all the gear and wine we had left behind.

The wildlife seen on the trip was extensive and a real visual treat. There was always a herd of muskox in view and we canoed very close and often approached them slowly on foot. They seemed to be either grazing on very sparse grass or resting and would probably have enjoyed daytime TV, although we did see males butting each other aggressively as a workup for the coming rut. Strangely, there was an abandoned muskox calf alone by the river; it was not long for this world, as there were white wolves patrolling the river banks.

The bird life was superb, with many nesting Arctic white owls, peregrine falcons, gyrfalcons and long tailed jaegers being seen. I never disturbed any bird life for a photograph,

Muskox

Wolf

but one day I came upon a snowy owl nest which contained 3 chicks and 2 eggs; the parents were in the air above and had ringed the nest with lemmings for snacks. Creatures survive in the Arctic by eating each other, and the lemmings are at the bottom of the food chain. Through binoculars, I watched Arctic foxes hunting lemmings; they would stalk them and make a high leap to pounce on the lemmings. I also saw foxes swimming the river to hunt on the other bank. I read that Arctic fox pups eat each other in the den and that only the strongest one survives.

Another curious event were solitary sandhill cranes, which appeared overhead, repeatedly calling to us on the ground; they would then land close by and try to make friends. I can only guess that they had been separated from the flock in flight and had mistaken us on the ground for their companions.

There were carpets of wild flowers unique to the Arctic, with only a fleeting life span; this is not my field, but I am sure a botanist would have found the sight a feast. But to put all of this flora and fauna aside, I was astounded by all the evidence of past human habitation. We came upon several sites of dense human habitation from Inuit, Thule and Dorset cultures. Almost every promontory on the river banks contained old food caches made of flat stones stacked up.

One of the ships searching for the lost Franklin expedition was the HMS Investigator, which was ice-bound at Mercy Bay on Banks Island in 1854. Mercy Bay is the mouth of the Thomsen River. The ship had been locked in the ice for three years before the crew walked away and were rescued by another ship, which was also then ice-bound. The Inuit visited the wreck site every year afterwards on their summer hunting trips to salvage valuable metal and wood.

There were several human habitation sites on the banks of the river and in one, Head Hill, I found a sliver of rusted iron and a piece of a barrel stave with a tongue and groove edge. I am certain that these came from the Investigator site and tied in nicely with the now successful federal government search for the Franklin ships. At this site were several shelters built with flat stones and the guide suggested that they were graves, but I doubt if the Inuit would place graves in the centre of the settlement and I feel they were probably dog kennels. This and the other sites were dense with several layers of bones and tent rings. The amount of bones defied belief – the ground was solid with muskox skulls, vertebrae, caribou horns and bird bones. All of the bones had been smashed open to extract the marrow. One of the group indicated where the fire hearth was inside the tent rings. I didn't like to point out that there was no fuel to cook with, and that "Eskimo" means "eater of raw meat".

These sites had been in use for millennia. A guide had the research papers from one of the sites at Shoran Lake, where an archaeological survey had been carried out decades before, and the site had been dated to Pre-Dorset cultures, about 3,400 years ago. There were at least 1000 muskox skulls on the ground, and the whole site was a dense carpet of moss-covered bones with many tent rings.

Landscape

I found a stone spear point and a sharpened stone cutting tool. My most remarkable find was a deep cross groove cut in an isolated rock, which I am certain was used to sharpen stone projectile points. To stand in this site and realize that people had lived, laughed and loved here for generations in this vast tract of wilderness was overwhelming. The ingenuity of man to survive by killing a muskox with a stone spear, today's smartphone wielding society placed here would simply starve to death.

In every direction muskox were grazing below in the wet plains of the Thomsen River and wandering the crests of the long green hills that slope down to the river. The muskox could be approached, if very slowly and close to the ground and I think the Inuit may have approached behind a portable skin blind, as there is no natural cover, or cliffs to drive them over. There were huge flocks of geese on the river and the habitation sites were covered in bird bones, I assume they were hunted by bow and arrow, but again the ingenuity of man, when the only available materials were driftwood and stone arrow heads.

The trip down the river took 8 days of steady paddling, and there was no real current.

The plane failed to show at the pre-arranged time and pickup point, and we used a satellite phone to contact the aviation company, who said they could not fly because of sea fog around Sachs Harbour. Where we were, the sky was clear and a similar plane passed overhead, leaving us wondering. We later found out that this aircraft had been exclusively chartered by federal government scientists and was operating out of Sachs Harbour only. The scientists were doing a study of the reasons for the decline of the caribou in the area. It seemed to me that it was obvious that the caribou were suffering from lead poisoning by the residents of Sachs Harbour and their ATVs. But then I don't have a Ph.D.

At the hotel in Inuvik I ran into another group of five federal government scientists who had an enormous amount of equipment and were heading out to an Inuit hunting camp

Overlooking Upper and Lower Kananaskis Lakes, Kananaskis Country (Photo: Mary Sanseverino)

where beluga whales were being taken. They intended to conduct research on the dead whales.

The most incredible example of federal government largesse was the construction of an all-weather road between Tuktoyaktuk and Inuvik; construction is already underway, starting from both ends. At present the settlements are linked only by a winter ice road. We had flown over this area and it is the delta of the Mackenzie River, with hundreds of lakes and muskeg islands. There isn't enough gravel in Canada to fill in a road bed; if it is ever finished, the maintenance costs will be grotesque.

While re-booking my missed flights I took in all of Inuvik, where a mosque has just been completed, for the benefit of the Muslim Sudanese workers, who are employed as the work force in the area.

Participant: Graham Maddocks

Our Summer in the Alpine

Kristen Walsh
July 15 – September 6

Driving along the highway, I read the road sign "High mountain road, expect sudden weather changes." I smiled to myself, knowing that this was what was in store for the summer. Mary Sanseverino and I would be spending the next two months hiking into the alpine, to mountain fire lookouts located along the eastern slopes of Alberta's Rocky Mountains.

We left the Island on July 15, said adieu to the coast, and were mountain bound at long last. "Who doesn't love the Rocky Mountains?" a phrase that Mary would chirp throughout the summer.

We arrived in Kananaskis Country – which was to be our home base. After a meeting with the Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, we soon cut to the chase and embarked upon our first hike into a fire lookout – Moose Mountain – a hike I would repeat multiple times over the summer field season. Moose is an extraordinary place for the surrounding views it offers of the front ranges of the Canadian Rockies; Nihahi Ridge, Mt. Glasgow, Mts. Romulus and Remus are just a few of the peaks nearby. And, Moose looks over a number of important drainages into the Elbow River. It's also subject to some pretty stiff winds. This is of interest to my thesis, focussing on how wind is experienced in mountain environments. As we approached the dome before the final summit to the lookout, Mary stopped, set up the tripod and robotic camera mount and started shooting a stunning pano. It was a perfect Rocky Mountain day – sunny blue skies with only the resident ravens in the sky. The lookout observer offers them eggs in the spring, to nudge them along when food is scarce. But come mid-July, food is easy enough to find – certainly that was the case for the two-year-old grizzly we ran into the following day, whose berry feasting was quite evident in the piles it left behind on the trail.

That week we completed four hikes into lookouts in K-Country, catching a vivid storm over the Ya-Ha Tinda range, a show of wildflowers in bloom around Kananaskis lakes and a few refreshing cold water dips.

Photo: (file name: Storm over Barrier Lake). Title: Storm over Barrier Lake. Credit: Mary Sanseverino

The following week Mary and I made our way south into the

A storm over Barrier Lake (Photo: Mary Sanseverino)

Sheep Wilderness Area. (Photo: Mary Sanseverino)

Highwood Range, where our hikes into lookouts involved some moderate scrambling, lush alpine meadows, a snow storm, and a visitor – Mike Whitney was out from Victoria! While Mary's singing halted any further bear encounters, we delighted in watching a family of grouse waddle around.

Early August saw us even farther south, down to Waterton Lakes National Park and the Flathead Ranges. After weeks of solid hiking, we both marvelled at how lucky we were to be doing "fieldwork". Was it always this much fun? Upon arriving at a lookout, Mary would say "I think this is my favourite one" and then we would be blown away by the beauty of the next spot. Lookouts were, after all, strategically chosen for their commanding view of the surrounding landscape.

Photo (file name: Junction Mountain Ridge). Title: Sheep Wilderness Area. Credit: Mary Sanseverino

Mary continued to take panorama photos from the mountaintops while I would interview the fire lookout observer. On our descents, we would brainstorm thesis ideas in between bits of bad singing to make our presence known to the forest.

For our final hike together before Mary's departure to Revelstoke, we made our way north to Grand Cache and the Willmore Wilderness. Our route was in the Hells Creek / Mt. Hamell region. The steep, rutted road down from up top and harsh winds of the place helped explain why the annual grueling run up and past the summits in this area is known as the "Death Race." But far from Zombies, the folks who run the race kindly delivered bags of spinach to the lookout when they learned her produce had run thin.

Mary's departure saw me into the final stages of the field season, where I spent two weeks living with lookouts and experiencing various weather as it moved through the mountains. From hail to snow, 160-kph wind gusts to 1 km visibility from wildfire smoke, the road sign warning from the beginning of the summer rang true: sudden changes indeed! If you don't like the weather, wait five minutes – and bring an extra pair of socks!

A big thank-you to the Alpine Club of Canada Vancouver Island Memorial Youth Grant for contributing to my summer of fieldwork high in the Rockies – it was a deeply rewarding experience and an amazing adventure.

Participants: Kristen Walsh, Mary Sanseverino

Mt. Edziza Plateau

Keith Battersby
Late July – early August

For whatever reason, I have been intrigued with the idea of Mt. Edziza for some time. Perhaps not your usual and dramatic mountaineering objective, this 75-km plateau traverse is a fascinating and dramatic hike, with opportunities for getting up high as well. The landscape is beautiful, colourful and at times challenging, with diverse changes in flora from nothing to verdant green valleys draining to the Stikine river system. This also proved to be an ideal trip for my 14-year-old son, along with a friend and his father. This was a great chance to be free of his older sister, and enjoy a road trip (two full days from the Island was more than enough for me).

There are a few options for entering the park and gaining the plateau. Any of the trail options require long difficult hours. We opted for the efficient float plane trip in and out. The road trip ends at Tatogga Lake Resort, about five hours north of Terrace. The flight in gave us great views of Mt. Edziza from the east: spectacular lava flows winding below. The most recent volcanic activity was only 1300 years ago, leaving much of the land devoid of vegetation. Our hike began at Buckley Lake, a trail and route that follows the western flank of the mountain at 1250 – 1750 meters for about 75 km. The climb up to the plateau that first day was similar

The north aspect of Mt Edziza (Photo: Keith Bettersby)

Camp 2 and Coast Mountains beyond

Approaching the summit

to many interior trips: hot work through pine and spruce forests, evidence of caribou, lots of evidence of bears. As we reached the plateau, however, much of that vegetation gave way to scrub willow and rivulets of lava. Water can be found in not so many places in late summer, dictating how far we had to travel. Horse pack outfitters use the park as well; their first major camp a welcome watering hole before reaching the plateau proper.

Soon after leaving treeline, the expanse of the plateau opens up, with views toward the north side of Mt. Edziza as we passed through the first of several dozen cinder cones which dot the landscape with the most recent volcanic activity. The trail skirts three of these before the first logical campsite, an intermittent stream flowing off the north side of Eve Cone. The lava isn't for bare feet but presents dramatic photographic opportunities as foreground to the permanent snow and glacier cap of Edziza.

Our trip had a bit of time pressure and so, if we were going to give ourselves a day to play in the snow, Day 2 had to be another long day. But not without a side trip up Eve Cone, a classic shaped dome dominating the western skyline as we left camp. Here we saw our only caribou of the trip, but up close and very impressive. Back down on the plateau, the rest of the day was hours of tussock grass, down and up over creeks and valleys, maintaining our elevation but slowly traversing round to the west side of the mountain. Our camp that night sat below what appeared the most direct access up the mountain, with beautiful evening colours and unimpeded views of the east side of the coast mountains beyond the Stikine Valley.

With basic equipment, rope, harnesses, some slings and carabiners, and only two axes, we were not planning a serious assault but kept the direction of the summit as a goal. We had good fun with the boys, exploring up benches, across scree slopes and up one of many glaciers coming off the mountain. With care the footing was OK and the crevasses were all open. The lateral moraine led to a nice rounded snow slope, giving us access to the large flat cap that must cover much of the original crater. The clouds were in and out, making for some focussed route finding to cross to the slopes below the summit. There was a broad fan of ice lightly covered by snow below the couloir on the summit approach. Without crampons this was a tentative climb but with no hazard below. The boys had no difficulty; the fathers however, perhaps with added weight, had more issues. The axes helped and we all gained a snowy ridge forming the edge of a huge windblown feature terminating below the couloir.

Kerry had been here before without reaching the top; his motivation was greater to push further. He kicked his way up to the couloir and I followed. But the weather wasn't really cooperating: poor visibility and lots of places to easily lose our way descending. He climbed a small bump perhaps 50 m below the summit and we began to retrace our steps. The boys had no inclination to come up and were huddled in the gully cooling off.

Our trip down was thoroughly enjoyable; the traverse of the snow-cap gave an opportunity to film Kalum and Finn doing a mock running workout in whiteout conditions for their club. We chose a different spur onto the glacier, below one which proved to be a treasure of fascinating small rocks and boulders. The ice was never far below and so the footing had its challenges, and the exit off the toe had but one small bridge. Without that we were faced with a climb back up soft scree and muck. Luck was with us and the route back to our tents gave us more time to hunt for caribou remains and their ever-present sculpting of the grasses.

There is little shelter from wind anywhere in this landscape. Our second night at this camp and the next spot both proved that. Day 4 began wet and dreary, sopping tents, etc.; early on, though, we spotted a fox and a less than happy rabbit, someone's breakfast. But the terrain was beginning to change again, too, more evidence of pumice and beautiful lava-formed rocks. Other highlights this day were a lunch spot at the head of and overlooking a brilliant plush green valley, a picturesque stream winding through vibrant moss and flowers, then tumbling into the bluffy ravine below. This was a quick Mr. Noodles stop, putting some warmth back inside ourselves. Gradually climbing into an area of densely scattered cinder cones, the next depression was occupied by a solitary mountain sheep. Whether curious or lacking good eyesight or fear or both, the sheep grazed and passed within 20 feet of us. If there is a trust or understanding at times like this, I always cherish such moments. Soon we lost all vegetation, climbing and skirting around bluffs, with the light and ground cover similar tones

Lava fields and cinder cones - Cartoona Peak beyond

of grey. As soon as we found a decent water source we stopped for the night in what felt like a moonscape. Bright reds and oranges of several of the cones contrasted the greys of the plateau. We nicknamed this spot the land of "tiny, tiny rocks" after a scene from Monty Python. Small floating stones of pumice presented a different challenge for filling our water containers from the stream. This was like camping on a windswept beach, sand everywhere!

I am always thrilled to get up high, especially on snow. But our fifth day was a real treat, the weather and landscape always changing, the scenery spectacular. The real "drama" of the volcanic plateau unfolds. Grey mist and grey underfoot, there was first an hour's climb up to a broad pass, and there was the day's work ahead of us. The trail descended down soft sand – the sort you put your foot into gingerly to avoid filling them to the brim (my wife had the gaiters on the North Coast Trail). We lost a fair bit of elevation looking for a suitable spot to cross one of two significant streams. Back and forth, up and down. I finally just put the crocs on and began ferrying packs and youths across. It only took 15–20 minutes afterward to warm my feet enough to push on. The things we do for our kids.

For several hours afterward the trail traversed around cones and craters with names like Cocoa and Coffee, and dropped in and out of small creeks and depressions, all the while providing beautiful views of volcanic remnants.

Trip's end

Before our midday break, we dropped to a broad flat lava field, a labyrinth of sharp black forms that oddly after a while all looked the same. And if you are trying to follow a route marked with "cairns", I'm not surprised we were led astray more than once. But really we just had to get across to the base of a long ridge beyond and over that before we could consider looking for a campsite. I am sure there were several ways across; we chose the western shoulder, it seemed sunnier that way. And we found that flank strewn with obsidian, the shiny black rock formed when hot lava comes in contact with water and is cooled quickly. The other reward was having the incessant wind at our backs for a while. We had been up fairly high all day; now we dropped, to begin crossing another significant drainage and pushing east before our final descent to Mowdade Lake and our scheduled flight out on Day 7. Again we were rewarded with a dramatic camp in a colourful valley that bridged the gap between the Spectrum Range to our south and the Mt. Edziza plateau now just behind us. Kerry had seen wolverine here on a previous trip. No such luck this time.

The last hiking day was, true to form, the muckiest. It began innocently enough with a spectacular descent into Chakima valley, on this day a bright tapestry of greens, reds, yellows and blacks. It degenerated fairly quickly to a slippery slog up and down, in and out of a trail seriously eroded by pack horses. Outfitters are allowed to traverse the park; we met up with none, but their presence was all too evident on this last day. The foot trail and pack trail are one and the same here, and their camps and areas where the horses are hobbled seem a significant blotch on the landscape. Nonetheless we found other topics to complain about lower down on the flood plain. The trail proved to be a stream for several kilometres, knee-deep or more if you found yourself in a beaver pond. Now my boots are old, big and leather. I'm guessing they more than made up for the weight of food eaten up 'til then. We were very conscious of bears here; again, none sighted, but they were definitely around. There were signs of moose as well.

Mowdade Lake was the end of our hike or so we hoped. It was not until late the following day our pilot was able to leave Tatogga Lake and pick us up. Most of us have fond memories of after-trip meals. This one topped my list. Huge, juicy and delicious at Tatogga Lake Resort.

We had one day to kick back and enjoy some fly fishing for Rainbow and Brown Trout, drifting lazily down the river draining Kinaskan Lake before our friends drove Finn and me to the Terrace Airport: a short five-hour drive, the start of two days travel to Port Hardy, North Vancouver Island, and a paddling trip in God's Pocket and beyond.

Participants: Kalum Delaney, Kerry Delaney, Finn Battersby, Keith Battersby

A Week in the Hills – Cyclone Peak Summer Camp 2015

Rick Hudson
August 2 – 9, 2015

It's never easy packing for an alpine trip when the temperature is hovering close to 30°C and all you can think of is T-shirts and shorts; but somehow you have to remember the cold times. Fleece top, fleece pants, puffy jacket and, contrary to the past 2 months of blazing heat, a rain jacket.

Meet up at the Pony Restaurant in Pemberton for a final greasy meal, and an intro to some of the new faces. We're only 13 this week - is that unlucky? We're not a full complement, but that makes the helicopter weight issue less of a worry.

Then we're off to the staging ground, a large open area in the forest used previously by log sorting equipment (some of which is still lying face-down in the nearby shrubbery), and Rambo, judging by the shotgun shells and 9-mm casings scattered about. This is clearly Marlboro Country. We pitch tents, swat the few itinerant horseflies, and turn in, expectant as always of what the morrow and the ensuing week will bring.

What it brings is a helicopter right on time, and a hail of flying bark chips and gravel that sticks in the hair and ears, until the roar eases and we emerge from behind the gear piles. Doug has a brae Scots accent, and will be our pilot today. The safety talk follows, then we pack what we can into the A-Star's generous storage areas, and four of us are off, rising up the valley in a spiraling arc as the blades sweep overhead and the tree tops skim just out of reach below. Why do pilots hug the slope like that? Doug explains it's a safety thing. Contrary to logic, being close to one valley wall means that, if things suddenly go wrong, he has the full width of the valley in which to do something. Like, aim for a tree on the other side.

There's no time to think this through before we burst over a rise, and below are the two orange domes next to a lake (elevation 1,950 m), and a bunch of coloured ants running around, jumping on boxes to hold them down. The motor eases and we step out into cool air and friendly handshakes. Week 2 is all packed and ready to go home.

In an hour the exchange is over, and silence returns to the alpine. A light wind disturbs the horseflies as we take stock of our surroundings. Sites are sampled, tents pitched, and it's time to take in some of the territory, and put some of that rushed advice from Week 2 into practice. We head east through meadows of the upper Van Horlicks Valley, bound for the lake on a bench which, because it's Sunday today, becomes known as Sunday Lake. All 13 of us troop along, while we look up left and right at the steep slopes of heather and granite bluffs that hem us in.

The flowers are OK, though not as good as some prior years. No doubt the heat wave that's held BC in its grip for months brought spring to the alpine earlier this year. Talking of heat, on the way back to camp we pass Willows Beach, an unlikely strip of fine white sand that leads into the lake next to camp. We all strip off and swim, enjoying the cool after the day's heat, unaware that this will be the only time we'll do so all week.

The evening in camp is a celebration of communal cooking (fresh sausages in two flavours) and getting to know each other. There are folk from Edmonton and the Okanagan, as well as the usual suspects from the Island. We find shared experiences from past places and different trips as we weave our own non-FaceBook connections. And then it's time to see whether we did a decent job of flattening the ground under the tents. A big moon hangs in the sky as we drift off to sleep.

It's Monday, but one full of promise rather than rat-race dread. Everyone's keen to go somewhere. Russ calls in from the top of Asherah Pk, to say it's not hard to get up, and he'll be down for a late breakfast. A group of 6 decide to follow Week 2's advice and gain the high, mostly level ridge on the north side of camp, a rise of about 400 m up a steep heather slope, with pockets of krummholz (from the German for "crooked wood") forest. It helps to plan the up-route from a distance, before proximity hides and confuses what had seemed an easy line.

FRS radio checks are made at 10:00. Diane & Yuri are coming up a different line towards the ridge, followed by Russ who is back from Asherah. At about 11:00 Russ passes them; and then we hear over the airwaves that Diane has fallen and may be hurt. A brief discussion among the ridge party, and five will go back down the up-track, and I will join Russ. Then, we'll descend to the patient.

The day is thankfully sunny, but there are strong gusts out of the north-west. Diane is in a steep gully that shields her from the wind, and in sunshine, but an examination of her left leg reveals she has a prosthetic knee, which may complicate an evacuation. Russ and I splint and bandage it in best Slipstream style, then I push the "911" button on my SPOT (Satellite Personal Tracker - why don't you have one?). Diane says she isn't uncomfortable, but who knows how stoic she is? Yuri and Russ stay with her while I run down to camp.

The satellite phone is the next step. I hope like heck it works. It powers up OK, and then after a minute, it registers. I scan the camp emergency protocol, and call number one on the list - Pemberton RCMP. A teenager girl answers "Hello?"

The steep gully where she fell complicated the rescue (Photo: Russ Moir)

The patient being carried to the helicopter (Photo: Phee Hudson)

"Is this the Pemberton RCMP?"

"Hello?"

This goes on for about a minute as I debate whether I have a wrong number or not. Finally, the teenage voice admits this is, indeed, the RCMP.

"I want to report an accident, please."

"Hello?"

Mercifully, the phone goes dead as the satellite drops the call. I phone again. This time I get a dispatcher who actually knows what an emergency is. But when I explain I am near Lillooet Lake, he quickly advises me to call the Lillooet Ambulance Service. I'm half way through explaining that Lillooet Lake is nowhere near Lillooet, and that an ambulance is not what I need, when the phone drops me again.

The third time, I get someone who understands I'm in the mountains. I read off the location of the accident (which I've set as a waypoint in my GPS). The dispatcher asks if this is the same accident as one already reported through the SPOT network. Bingo! We have connection. But a minute later while I'm describing the patient's condition, the satellite drops me again.

And the phone battery is flat. I replace it with the second battery and hope it lasts. I call again. A new dispatcher answers. After a minute of explanation he's up to speed and advises that he has contacted the Pemberton SAR service. I switch off, update Yuri and Russ by radio, and wait. Half an hour later I call back and learn the SAR guys are on their way.

At around 3:00 p.m. a Blackcomb Aviation helicopter comes up the valley, slows, and then moves purposefully across the steep heather slope, obviously looking for the rescue site. Once they've located Diane, Yuri and Russ, they come in low over camp and settle on a level patch of grass next to the lake. Five SAR techs in various shades of red emerge, along with numerous bags of equipment. The pilot starts removing all the doors, while two of the guys dress in techie gear. They and the helicopter then head back to the accident site, while the remainder hang around, sorting equipment.

From camp we watch the helicopter place a skid on top of a rock bluff, and the two techs and a pile of gear jump out. The chopper pulls clear and the two figures scamper across the steep terrain towards the patient. The helicopter disappears towards Pemberton where, we are told by the SAR techs at camp, they need another SAR tech and a long line. Meanwhile, Diane is stabilized in a proper leg splint by a British-trained, ex-Iraq-War doc and his assistant.

By the time she's ready to go, the helicopter is back at camp. The long-line is unpacked and coiled out. One of the techs dons a spacey body harness. The helicopter lifts vertically and the orange line uncoils off the grass. He clips into an eye on the end with a gated karabiner, and rises like the prophet Elijah into the sky. I'm glad it's him and not me, no matter what the breaking strain on that karabiner gate is.

The chopper, despite strong wind gusts, places the SAR tech right in the gully where Diane is. We can't quite see from camp what's going on, but he must have unclipped, because the helicopter pulls away, returning a minute or two later to hover again. Then it rises, this time with the tech and Diane attached to the end of the line. I hope Diane has her eyes firmly closed. The two of them stream out behind the helicopter as it turns and comes back to the landing ground in a graceful arc, its cargo far behind and below. Once hovering, it lowers slowly towards the ground until, light as thistledown, the tech's feet are on the ground, Diane is caught by two supporters, and the line is unhooked. She's safe. When I get close, it's clear she's in shock, whether from the injury or that ride, we'll never know. We slip insulation under her and cover her with blankets. The day has turned dark and cloudy, and her teeth are chattering.

The helicopter lands, and there's a flurry of activity as gear

Nearly down on the ground at camp (Photo: Rick Hudson)

is sorted, techs change out of harnesses, and doors are replaced on the chopper. Diane is carried to the machine and made comfortable. Yuri and Russ have hiked down with the two attending techs, and Yuri quickly packs his gear and chooses a few bags to take with him. Around 6:00 p.m. the blades start to whirl again, and they, together with two SAR guys, depart for Pemberton, Whistler Hospital, and finally Vancouver General, where it transpires Diane has a broken left femur. I cannot imagine the pain she must have endured during those long hours of waiting.

The Rest of the Week

Supper that night was a subdued affair, but by morning things were somewhat back to normal. Russ and I decided to have a look at the col between Asherah and Cyclone Peaks. With nothing specific in mind. It was just a nice day and it looked like an interesting place to get to. The Week 2 crowd had pointed out the preferred line linking boulder slopes and snow patches, and in just over an hour we found ourselves on the broad col, looking south to a clutter of summits dominated by Meditation Peak, 2,574 m, the highest in that area.

The day being young, we thought we might as well have a look at the ridge to Cyclone Peak (2,499 m) to the east, but it quickly became apparent that the ridge itself would require a lot of up and down. A better line was to take a rising traverse up the southern flanks, which brought us out on the ridge near the top just as the 11:00 a.m. radio check was due. As we could see the Van Horlicks Valley below through a gap in the ridge, we had good reception. And, after yesterday's events, we were keen to check in with each other regularly. The Monday rescue had highlighted just how important it was to be able to communicate.

An hour later we were on top of a broad summit where we lay around indigently, ate snacks and watched dark clouds begin to boil up from the west. They did not promise much good news. Suitably concerned, we idled no more, but returned to the col in short order, on the way down passing a perfectly formed granite tetrahedron that must have weighed 5 tons, perched on a heather ledge.

The evening brought rain, sounding much louder on the taut dome tents than it actually was. Later it turned to hail, drowning out conversation inside. All of us silently thanked our lucky stars that we weren't rescuing Diane in that. Albert braved the outdoors to take photos of the surrounding area, whitened as if by snow. Lightning flashes and rolling thunder added to the evening's symphony. The appies, bridge rubbers, dinner and coffees passed quickly, after which most slipped off to their tents before it was fully dark (about 9:30 p.m.). Tucked into snug sleeping bags, we listened to the rain gradually build in intensity, and hoped like heck everyone was keeping dry.

Wednesday brought a gloomy scene of thick mist, sodden canvas, and dripping heather, all smothered in a surreal murky world. Fifty shades of grey, as someone pointed out. The day passed telling stories about Vietnam, Ladakh, the Queen, politics in China, fishing in Scotland, and why not to live in Toronto. And tea. Lots of tea, while the rain alternately drummed and tapped on the taut tent fabric, and storm gusts raised and lowered the tempo. The wind backed during the day. In the rain we hurriedly added guy lines to the SE sides of both dome tents, as the poles bent and the fabric strained at the seams.

Songs, charades and more tea followed. Finally, another communal dinner came, with everyone crowded into the cook tent to make the most of the heat from the stoves. The spare tent was just icy.

Thursday, thankfully, dawned a lot more cheerful, and various souls emerged like groundhogs nervously looking for their shadows. Hurrah, there were plenty. Plans were laid over a sunny breakfast, to head out in a variety of directions. Phee offered to lead an exploration of the Van Horlicks Valley to look for flowers, and Gill, Lynne and Kathy signed up. Russ and I tagged along. The mood was easy, there were plentiful stops to photograph unusual shrubbery, and Linnaean names passed in one ear and out the other.

The broad valley was grass and heather covered, and bathed in sunshine. We followed a meandering line downstream, with numerous detours to look at unusual plants. Then, after an idle lunch that occupied the statutory full hour, we turned our noses upwards and climbed a long

Phee Hudson and Russ Moir looking south from the summit of Asherah Peak to Meditiation Peak (Photo: Rick Hudson)

heather ridge that paralleled Cyclone Peak. It brought us into the alpine barrens where the ladies found, to their delight, a patch of albino willow herb that Margaret Brown had hurriedly described during the helicopter change-over on the previous Sunday. Much excitement followed, but no one, in hindsight, was smart enough to collect a few seed pods for posterity.

No matter. We returned in triumph to camp with stirring tales of ice white flowers and rarities, and the mood was considerably more upbeat than on previous evenings when weather or accidents had taken their toll.

Friday dawned equally clear and still, unlike the gustiness of prior mornings, when we'd been kept indoors over breakfast. The lake outside camp was like glass, reflecting the image of Cyclone Peak to perfection. Still, the occasional wind gust is no bad thing where bugs are concerned. But to date, the rain and cold had clearly done their job well, and the wind was merely an added benefit for deerfly management.

While others made their plans, Russ, Phee and I set out to repeat Russ' trip up Asherah Peak, at 2,546m the highest in the valley. On the way up we flushed a ptarmigan and 3 chicks out of the flowers, before reaching the glacier, which Russ cheerfully advised "wasn't as bad as it looked." It was. Steep, icy, in shadow, with no snow on the lower sections, muddy with that sticky, gritty stuff that glaciers are so good at making, the rocks were loose and the going messy until we hit snow higher up, and things improved.

As the views broadened and the snow became crunchy underfoot, we emerged into the sun. The summit was close, just across a rising section of clean glacier, with a few crevasses. Russ weaved through them like a slalom skier, and in short order we were discarding harnesses and crampons, and walking up a gentle slope to the summit. There, fine views in all directions and no less than five ptarmigan greeted us.

Rock ptarmigan (as they should correctly be called) are part of the grouse family, and the name comes from the Gaelic word "tarmachan", meaning "croaker", after the male's mating call in the spring. For anyone not familiar with the species, their specialty is they don't fly away when approached, allowing you to get very close, for those non-zoom photos. Their plumage is a marvel of camouflage, and even in hi-res pictures, their edges can appear fuzzy, so subtly do they blend into the background. Apart from the red stripe above the eye, they are the ultimate in merging into the surroundings, and that, coupled with choosing to live above the predator line (apart from eagles) and their habit of freezing rather than flying, no doubt explains how they survive.

On the descent we took a direct route down the ridge, which avoided the bare ice, and connected a number of snow patches that provided easy booting. In short order we found ourselves in the meadows above camp again, gazing down on the two orange domes and a sprinkling of little coloured tents.

Our last full day, Saturday, started off all right but as the morning wore on the wind backed SW and dark clouds built over the peaks to the south. Undeterred, a merry group of Shaun, David, Kathy, Phee and I set out to climb the ridge to the north of camp. This we chose to do via its east ridge which offered the gentlest angle, starting above the outlet of Sunday Lake (1,900 m) and rising to about 2,350 m. That's one of the nice things about the area - nothing is much more than 500 m above camp, so dawn starts aren't mandatory.

On the way we passed one of many small ponds in the forest. In its muddy shoreline was a fresh bear print. A young adult, we estimated, but the claw grooves were large enough. It was pointing away from camp, someone observed, which may, or may not, have been significant. Shortly thereafter we reached the foot of the spur and threaded our way up through meadows and rocks, avoiding most of the krummholz to get onto the clean ridge above. David and Shaun, with a combined age of over 150, were going well. What gradually became a cause of concern were the dark clouds building to the south-west. Here we went again.

At about 2,100 m we had a powwow. Getting down steep heather in driving rain wasn't on anyone's agenda so, although we were tantalizingly close to the top, we turned around and descended to Sunday Lake. There followed a brief lunch break in a hollow out of the wind, and then the first raindrops got us moving homeward. In the hour that followed, light squalls came and went until the friendly sight of the orange domes hove into view.

Elsewhere, Roger and Albert had set out earlier for the col between Cyclone and Asherah Peaks, where they planned, like the bear in the song, to see what they could see. However, the steep talus took them longer to ascend than expected, and it was only at 2:00 p.m. that they called to say they were on their way back. Shortly after that, the rain

Team Week 3: Roger, Dotter, Russ, Lynne, David, Gill, Kathy, Phee, Rick, Shawn, Albert.

set in heavily, and we became concerned.

Like the others, Albert and Roger's combined age was close to 150, and we in base camp fretted about the slippery rocks they would inevitably have to negotiate on their descent. The 3:00 p.m. and then the 3:30 p.m. radio calls went unanswered, and there was a noticeable tension in camp as the 4:00 p.m. schedule approached. As a precaution, we switched on a second radio, and it was this unit that allowed them to come in loud and clear. (The other radio was no longer working.) It was with some relief that they stumbled into camp, dripping wet but cheerful, around 4:30 p.m. after a good day on the hills. Everyone was accounted for.

The evening was, once again, spent listening to raindrops on the dome tents, with various plans afoot to deal with the camp take-down in the morning under trying conditions. I contacted the base manager at Blackcomb Aviation on the satellite phone. He said the forecast was for a drier tomorrow. Cold, wet and windy, we turned in, unsure of how it would all play out in the morning.

Dawn brought a clearing trend and considerable relief. Russ had, on the Saturday, already packed the shower stall and one of the two biffies, and after an early breakfast (in the sun) and many warnings of "Last call for the biffy," the second unit was disassembled, the hole filled, and the two dome tents came gently to ground, almost dry after a damp night.

The chopper arrived on time, but the first flight out went somewhat awry. With both luggage compartments loaded, and a full fuel tank, the chopper failed to lift the sling load. The net skidded across the ground, ending up in the shallows of the lake. The pilot promptly jettisoned the sling line. Shifting tack, he flew out two loads of passengers to burn off fuel, while a couple of us re-positioned the net on dry ground and reconstructed the gear pyramid. This time there was enough lift, and the net swung away down-valley.

Leaving a camp is always sad, especially after a week. As the last shuttle lifted off the grass, I looked down at two (surprisingly) small brown rings where the domes had stood for 3 weeks, a few footpaths that wandered to nowhere in particular, and nothing else. The site was as if no one had ever been there.

Treetops sped past the swirling blades, down, down into the valley below, where the milky waters of Lillooet Lake appeared, grew larger, and then finally dipped behind trees as we dropped into the staging ground, bark chips and gravel billowing out and away. We settled to earth.

Post script: Summer camps don't just happen; they come about because of the big effort of a dedicated band of organizers who work half a year to make it possible for us to enjoy a week in the hills. Thank you Liz Williams, Peggy Taylor and everyone else who pitched in to make this happen.

Week 3 participants: David Anderson, Gill Brown, Yuri Drohomirecki, Dotter Field, Albert Hestler, Phee Hudson, Rick Hudson, Diane Lyon, Russ Moir, Lynne Moorhouse, Roger Painter, Shaun Peck, Kathy Wylie.

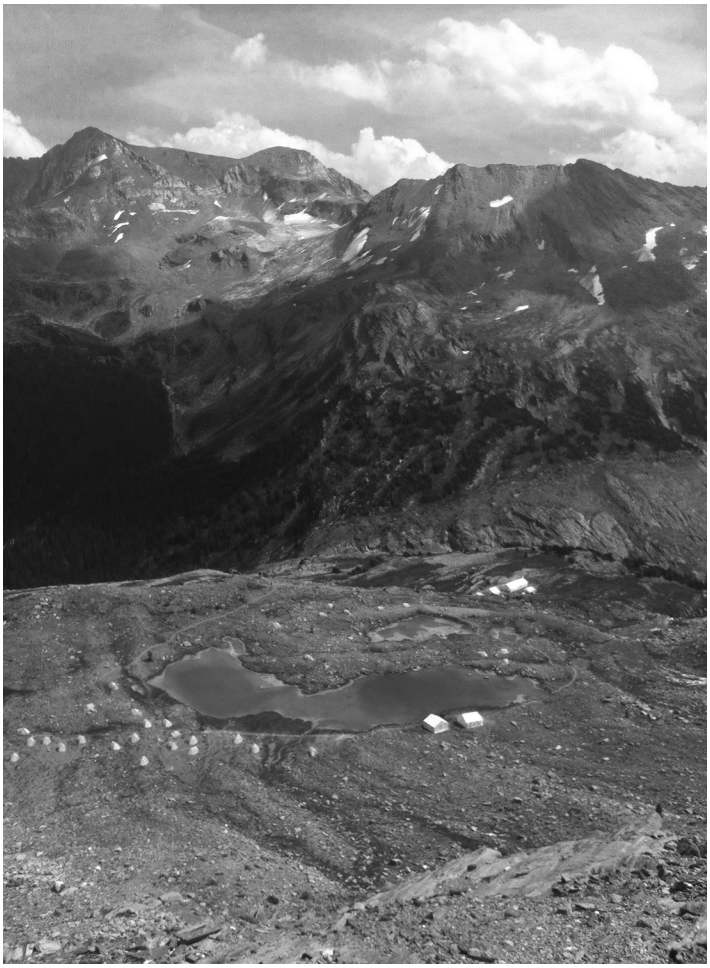
Week 5 of the Stockdale Creek GMC

Mike Hubbard
August 8 – 15

I felt so good after our Cyclone summer camp that I immediately cast my net around for a follow up. Emails to the GMC coordinator in Canmore and to Brad Harrison's rival BMC resulted in one bite. There was a last minute cancellation and space at the GMC starting the Saturday following our return from Cyclone. For those who have not been to a GMC I highly recommend it and here is a diary of what turned out to be one of the best that I have attended.

Saturday, August 8

After a leisurely 2 days drive to Radium Hot Springs and a night at the Tyrol Motel, the group met for breakfast at the Best Western Prestige Inn at 8 a.m. with our Camp Manager and ACC staff. From there most of us convoyed up the Horsethief Creek forest service road to the staging area, with what turned out to be the wiser ones taking a shuttle bus to the same location. Nine flights later we were all in camp, situated on a bench above the toe of the Stockdale Glacier south of Bugaboo Provincial Park and north of



Stockdale Creek camp (Photo: Mike Hubbard)

Jumbo Pass. The group was made more interesting by the company of 12 students from the University of Alberta with their own guides and professors including Dr. David Hik, a biologist presently working out of the Kluane Lake Research station in the Yukon, who had recently returned from the scientific climate change conference in Paris, which was a precursor to the political conference just concluded. I was delighted to meet Sonia Langer at the heli pad. She had just completed The North Face summer course as our nominee, was looking bronzed and fit and had had what sounded like a challenging, and at times frustrating, week of bad weather. I settled into my deluxe single supplement 4-person tent and then hiked up the nearby moraine wall to acclimatise myself, as I was feeling the effects of our 7000-foot altitude. Dinner followed in the mess tent with the usual introduction of guides, the group members, and most importantly, the cooks: one of whom, Eli, had cooked for me before at Assiniboine Lodge and the Sir Sandford camp 2 years previously. One has to sign up for the next day's trip the evening before and most of us selected the snow and crevasse rescue school as an easy introduction to the area and useful refresher. Following an excellent meal we made up our lunch for the next day and a team of 6 helped with the voluminous dishes.

Sunday, August 9

The morning procedure is to wake up at 6 for breakfast at 6.30 with departure at 7 for medium and short days whilst those going on a longer day are woken at 4 by their Guide or Leader for breakfast at 4:30 and departure at 5. Snow school was thankfully a medium day and we departed at 7 for the glacier. Access was by a goat trail to the west of camp, parts of which were quite exposed and the whole of which was a steep grunt when not warmed up until one reached the moraine leading to the glacier. The school was back to basics as some participants had not travelled on glaciers before, so we covered putting on crampons, holding the ice axe, walking on ice and roping up for glacier travel. Interesting to note that clipping in with a carabiner seems to be the preferred tie-in for all rope members, just when I had got used to tying in directly to the rope with a figure-of-eight at Crag X and Skaha. It was a good thing we did rope up because within a few minutes of setting off across the snow there was a yell from behind me and Peter Wells, a retired academic from Nova Scotia of about my age, was in up to his neck. Cathy, our assistant guide and rope leader, who was leading my rope, had warned us about the dangers of stepping on any white snow over crevasses, and at the spot where Peter fell had specifically said not to step where she had placed a cross: it had looked all right to me but I noticed one foot go through a little, and hopped over. I should have made sure that Peter had heard Cathy's warning but as usual it is easy to be wise in hindsight. Fortunately the rope was tight and he did not go any further into what was a deep hole. One of the other ropes came back to us and we soon had him out with simple pulling power but it was a good lesson in the importance of communication and a tight rope. Once we reached a fairly benign snow slope we split into two groups: one doing self-arrests and the other putting in and testing T-slot anchors. For the latter the two points I learned were to put the clove hitch on the point of balance of the axe rather than the middle and to have the exit point of the sling at the full depth of the axe – obvious enough but worth remembering. Following lunch we headed back down the glacier and had a demonstration rescue of Cathy from a crevasse using both a 2:1 ratio and a 6:1. There was unfortunately not time for us all to practice setting up the rescue system as we were a large group but later in the week several of the shorter day groups did have some further practice.

Back in camp snacks are served in the tea tent immediately on return: a welcome custom as one is usually hungry right away especially after a swim or dip in the nearest creek; this is followed, at least for an old fellow like me, by a rest before the happy hour. This is also the time to sign up for the next day's trip on lists which are posted in the tea tent. One has to put a first choice and a second and there is a brief résumé of the nature of the trip and gear required on the list. These are reviewed by the guides and amateur leaders at a meeting after dinner and while one generally gets one's first choice, there is a selection process in accordance with both ability and numbers.

At the end of dinner there is what they call "Story Time," when a member of each party volunteers to relate the events of the day whilst wearing an exotic plumed hat. Sounds a little forced but it does give a structure to the eve-

Summit of Eyebrow

ning; one learns a lot about the presenter, something about the mountain climbed, and it is usually highly amusing. Needless to say, our unexpected crevasse rescue featured largely in our group's presentation.

Monday, August 10

I had signed up for Double Vision, a 10,000-ft glaciated peak involving what I like most: a basic walk up the glacier with no technical difficulty and a summit with wonderful views. It was also excellent acclimatization for the big one, Eyebrow (11,061 ft.), which I was determined to climb later in the week. The alternative for a medium day were mountains delightfully named Nudge Nudge and Wink Wink, which looked to me to be steep, exposed, rotten piles of rock and to be avoided. The day started with some rain and a little smoke from the Okanagan fires, but fortunately both cleared and we made the summit by 11 o'clock. I was looking forward to my usual relaxed plod back down our up route when our Guide, Matt Valade, from Squamish and Tofino, suggested that we should make a circuit of the mountain by descending down the east rock face to the glacier. It looked vertical to me but over we went unroped and unbelayed down steep and rotten rock; true enough it went with only one or two places where I was a little uncomfortable. This was I think my eighth GMC and I have always ended up stretching my tolerance to exposure but that I suppose is one of the benefits of being guided. I was glad of our recent trip to Skaha and the additional but limited confidence I had gained on rock although there is a tremendous difference between cleaned bolted routes on good rock and the rotten mixed and fractured rock of the Stockdale Group.

Soon we were back in camp for tea and a well-earned rest followed by the usual excellent dinner and the camaraderie of dishwashing which I always enjoy as it reminds me of the start of my working life as a summer dishwasher in a Salcombe Hotel in Devon. My partner at the sink in Salcombe had a PhD from the LSE but couldn't stand the stress of professional life and as usual in an ACC group there were a larger than average number of PhDs, most actually employed in their profession, so the conversation around the sink, as it had been in Salcombe, was varied and often stimulating.

Tuesday, August 11

This was to be my rest day, but as the weather was set fair and I fancied the big one on Wednesday, I signed up for "The Unibrow Adventure Tour" with my old friend Hamish from Parson, a trainee guide who had guided me at Battle Abbey skiing in 2014. We left soon after 7 and I was delighted to be going downhill for a change along a heathery bench toward the toe of the Stockdale Glacier. One of the endearing features of this bench, which started right by the dining tent, was a family of ptarmigan chicks, which judging by their size, must have hatched during week one, as they were totally accustomed to human beings and, to the alarm of their mother, quite fearless. I hope they did not succumb following our departure to the wolverine whose fresh tracks we saw on the way down to the glacier. At the glacier we had a choice – stay high on loose moraine or pick our way through contorted bare ice with a multitude of deep crevasses. I know what I would have done but this was a GMC and Hamish thought it would it be more interesting to rope up and travel the glacier ice. Whilst the ice was bare and crevasses all visible, the route was narrow and exposed and I received my first lesson in the use of ice screws, which was both interesting and reassuring.

After an hour or so of this we went off on to the pleasant rocky heathery summit of Unibrow just above camp. A good place for lunch, a snooze and then a plod down the gentler glacier of the snow school to camp. But – no, wouldn't it be interesting, said Hamish, to do the whole ridge of some 3 more bumps and then descend. It looked a bit steep to me, but – "let me know if you need a rope," says Hamish, and off we went. The second bump was extremely exposed on both sides and not only did I need a rope and a hip belay from Hamish but the only way for me was "au cheval". After some more of the same we arrived on the gentler third summit but how to get off? "Down there looks good," said Hamish, and with the three of us clumped together on the end of the rope and Hamish belaying from the top, down we went. The trouble was, Hamish could not see what was happening from where he was and there was about 40 feet of the most rotten crud that I have ever been in. "Not safe." say I. Hamish comes and looks; "Not safe," says he, and we changed tactics, going down one at a time with rocks from above and below tumbling past us to the glacier. Fortunately we were all able to keep out of the line of fire by unroping after the steep bit and we gained the glacier without mishap. Back to camp for a swim around 4. Not exactly a rest day but sure was interesting!

Wednesday, August 12

The Big One. I stumbled down to the breakfast tent in the dark and then at 5 a.m. we departed up the goat track with head lamps. It was easier on the nerves when one could not see the drop-off and soon we were roping up on the glacier. An hour or so of plodding and we came to where I would have stayed on the ice but no, says Matt,

The ice bridge

the icefall is too exposed and crevassed, so up a rather rotten and near-vertical slope we go, with Matt belaying us from behind a rock on the ridge. From the ridge it was an easy scramble along the ridge and a boulder descent back to the glacier above the ice fall. There were superb views to the south towards Lake of the Hanging Glaciers, Commander Glacier and, in the distance, Jumbo. Some more glacial plodding took us to the shoulder of Eyebrow where we snacked, dumped the rope and crampons and proceeded up the ridge. About an hour and a half took us to the summit and a leisurely lunch. Fantastic views to Jumbo to the south, the Bugaboos to the north and Farnham and Farnham Tower to the east. On the left ascending the ridge it is an almost vertical drop-off to the lower glacier, whilst to the west there is steep scree back down to the snow. It must be superb skiing in the spring. We had an uneventful descent back to the foot of the ridge scramble and were already anticipating tea and appies when word came over the radio that one of the U of A students had been hit by a falling rock on Nudge Nudge or Wink Wink and required helicopter evacuation. As radio contact between base camp and the accident scene was poor, we set ourselves up as a relay station and waited about an hour for the arrival of the helicopter from Golden. Fortunately it was a hand that had been hit and although a bone was broken and it was painful, there were no life threatening injuries. We were back in camp in time for a dip, a drink or so and another excellent meal.

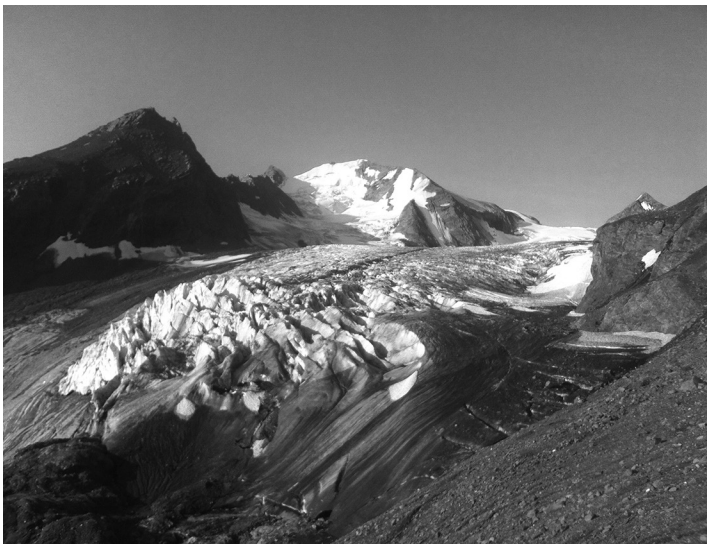
Thursday, August 13

Today I had really earned a rest day but as it was another blue-sky day, although some smoke was creeping in from the fires around Oliver. I went with Matt, John, a doctor from rural Saskatchewan, and his teenage and wonderfully enthusiastic son Silas to view the ice bridge at the northerly end of the glacier, which created a natural frame for views of Howser Spire, Snowpatch and Bugaboo spire. With the warm weather with which we had been blessed, the river we had to cross at the foot of the glacier was in flood and it made for some interesting moments. The mineralisation was fascinating with great chunks of pyrite scattered everywhere. The ice bridge was spectacular – when I arrived Matt was on top of it, with an arch below him some 20 or 30 feet high and beyond, framed in the arch, the Bugaboos. Lunch, a long sleep in the sun, and then a couple of hours trek back to camp, collecting pyrite samples as we went.

Friday, August 14

Today I signed up for Tea Peak, a snow and ice climb some distance back across the glacier to the west. The weather was changing but still clear. After crossing the glacier we climbed up some steep snow and across the bergschrund to the foot of the ice. It was not particularly steep but the consequences of a slip would have been fatal, so the plan was for the guide to place sufficient ice screws up the ice face to enable us to be secure if we fell. Although I have carried an ice screw for years this was to be my first ice climb where screws were really necessary: whilst a little nervous I was looking forward to it. Our guide had collected the party's screws, and was preparing to place them and fix the rope; my long vintage wooden axe had been replaced by a spare short metal one and an ice tool when word came over the radio from the group on the summit of Eyebrow that a severe electrical storm was rapidly approaching and that it would be wise to descend. We had been aware of blackness to the west and the distant rumble of thunder, but as it was blocked by the mountain before us, we were not, until the call, aware of its speed or intensity. A rapid change of plans and we descended as fast as we could to the icefield below. Cathy our guide, rather like a mother hen, chided John and me for being so relaxed and slow once we had un-roped and hit the bare ice as we ambled the mile or so of ice to the moraine whilst around us there were great flashes of lightning, and thunder claps resounded from the peaks. Fortunately it was dry up on the glacier but down towards Stockdale Creek it was black as hell and raining heavily. We made it safely back for early tea and a rest before the last night party.

I had been intending to give my usual rendering of the Ballad of Idwal Slabs but had been pre-empted by one of the guides, Cyril Shokoples, who had recited part of it the night before as an example of the type of entertainment expected, so I had been brushing up without much success on my only other party piece "Miss Joan Hunter Dunn". I need not have worried as after some wonderful skits, especially from the U of A students, Cyril went off to bed and somewhere near the end I gave them a somewhat muddled version of



Eyebrow from the lower glacier

the Ballad without Cyril being there to correct me.

Saturday, August 15

All packed and nowhere to go. The tent was cleaned and my bags were in a pile at the helipad for 8 a.m. but no chopper; the camp manager was scurrying around glued to a radio and sat phone looking worried. The news was that the Friday storm had resulted in mud slides that had taken out the road in two places below our vehicles and that it was not known how many hours or days it might take to open it. Eventually arrangements were made with Rocky Mountain Safaris of Invermere to ferry us down to Radium from below the slides, where we would await news as to when we could rescue our vehicles. On the flight out we were astounded to see the size of the washout and the damage done by the flash flood. After hanging around the new base helipad I finally got a ride in the Safari bus to Radium. Part way down we were cheered by the sight of a huge low-bed truck and trailer with an enormous grader on board heading the other way. We were in luck: about an hour before dark word came to the bar at the Prestige Inn that the road was open and that we could rescue our cars. Another bouncy trip up the Horsethief Creek logging road and as darkness fell, my car and I arrived back in Radium.

Sunday, August 16

Leaving at 4 a.m., I somehow managed to catch the 1 p.m. ferry from Tsawwassen and was back in time for an 80th birthday party at my ex-wife Barbara's in Victoria.

As always the GMC was a great experience with a wonderful mixture of people and one which I recommend to any member who wants to improve skills, be well fed and have a stimulating holiday.

The Stein Valley Traverse: an 8-day Trip through Four Seasons

Catrin Brown
August 8 – 18

They were five words on a map that I bought when I first came to live in BC in the early nineties that stuck in my head. "Two days from any help" was marked over a dotted line running west to east a relatively short distance outside Vancouver. The concept of an area so wild, close to a major metropolitan city, enthralled this European transplant. I had my first chance to peek into this special place, the Stein Valley, on a club trip organized by Judith Holm in August 1995. It was an action-packed weekend, but mostly I remember the extraordinary colours of Tundra and Figure-of-Eight lakes, and the distant view as we stretched our eyes towards Stein Lake. In those days we could drive the 12-km road from Lillooet Lake to Lizzie Lake, which certainly made access from the west quite inviting. Things change.

1995 was a landmark year for the Stein – and not because of our visit. Later that year, the *Stein Valley Nlaka'pamux Heritage Park* was formally made official, a successful conclusion to twenty years of campaigning for its protection by a coalition of interest groups. This last intact watershed within 150 km of Vancouver now stands as a testament to people power, and to its own unique ecology and history. The park is jointly managed by the provincial government and by the Lytton Indian Band.

It took another 20 years for me to return to the Stein. Things came together for August 2015, when with Erich Schellhammer, Martin Hofmann and Alcina de Oliveira, we planned to do the full traverse. "Planned" is actually an overstatement for the minimal messaging that passed be-

Erich, Martin and Alcina take in the view south from the ridge

Erich at the uniquely coloured Tundra Lake

tween us. It sufficed for us to fix the dates and "see you at the ferry line" – such is the joy of doing trips with tried and trusted friends. We decided to do the traverse in the less common east-to-west direction – despite the greater net height gain, we figured this would give us more time in the second half to enjoy the spectacular alpine. And so it was that after leaving one car at the trailhead just above Lillooet Lake, we started our trek at the confluence of the Stein and the Fraser rivers just outside Lytton, the small town that lays frequent claim to being Canada's hot spot.

This climatic boast seemed well justified as we sweated our way up alongside the beautiful and fast-flowing Stein. In the lower valley we found interesting examples of pictographs and petroglyphs from the Nlaka'pamux people, many apparently associated with young people's quests for a guardian spirit while spending months alone in this remote place. Each day the going for us got rougher and tougher, with more and more wind-blown and burned trees across the trail. A combination of grunts and curses, snagged and charred clothing and many ungainly poses became the ritual of negotiating each major obstacle with our full packs. The valley suffered a major burn in 1996, and sections of the trail are still very much affected. A site on route known as 'logjam camp' may convey the idea well.

From the upper canyon, we arrived at Stein Lake, and our biggest challenge of the trip. The 1200-m ascent to the alpine ridge high above the Stein Valley had no water. The heat seemed overwhelming as we lumbered up the steep switchback trail, desperately hoping our sucky tubes would not run dry before the top. As we gained the ridge, the transition from the dry ponderosa pine forests to the mountain air was welcome, and the views of the Coast Mountains opened up magnificently in all directions. Puppet Lake, nestled below the ridge, provided a welcome swimming hole and respite for the night, with the added bonus of being surrounded by loaded blueberry bushes.

The next day we navigated a glorious line across alpine meadows, to the col above Tundra Lake. Its unique cobalt blue colour was as spectacular as my earlier memories, and the slow passage around the steep boulder field on its north side gave us a chance to indulge its changing hue

Mist rising over Martin's morning coffee at Arrowhead Lake.

fully. The sky had been changing during the last 24 hours, and we made camp quickly as storm clouds rolled in. An hour or so later we were clinging to each other in the centre of the tent as a thunder and lightning storm of epic portions cracked and exploded all around. At least one strike was directly overhead, and we sat up terrified, listening to a massive rock fall that seemed to be rumbling closer. How vivid the imagination in the middle of the night!

We survived to emerge into a misty morning of sudden cool. The extensive ridge of our journey west was now in thick mist and teased us with minimal navigational clues - we may as well have been back on Vancouver Island. The rain seeped through our clothing, presenting us with the new challenge of keeping warm. By late afternoon the teasing patches of blue finally won the sky and gave us a glorious last night with lifting mist at Arrowhead Lake.

We descended to the Lizzie Lake cabin, which is still offering welcome shelter, though in need of some TLC. The large boulder field known as the 'Gates of Shangri-La' guards the entrance to the valley, and seemed relatively easy now that our packs were so much lighter without our 8 days food. From Lizzie Lake it was hard to believe that 20 years ago I had driven a logging road, as we pushed through the relentlessly dense brush and alder well over our heads for 12 kilometres. That would have been a brutal start if we had started the trail from the west.

The claim of any terrain being "two days from any help" in this age of Spot communication devices may be no more than an endearing curio from a different time, like a telephone kiosk. But the fact is we were entirely alone for 6 days of our trip, passing other hikers only on the first and last days. True wilderness does still exist – beautiful, unpredictable, and inspiring as ever. Thanks to my wonderful fun companions for weathering the storms together – meteorological and metaphorical. And to the thousands of people who worked together to protect this land and make this journey possible.

Trip participants: Alcina de Oliveira, Martin Hofmann, Erich Schellhammer, Catrin Brown

Mount Tupper

Knut von Salzen
August 21– 26

Mt. Tupper's spectacular south face and prominent buttress are a major photo-op for visitors stopping at the Roger's Pass visitor centre in Glacier National Park. The mountain is part of the Hermit Range in the Selkirk Mountains which also comprises Mt. Rogers, Swiss Peaks and The Hermit, all of which make Roger's Pass such a scenic drive. Although Mt. Tupper is only 2804 m high, the summit is 1511 m above the trailhead at the Trans-Canada highway, making it a rather substantial mountaineering objective. Indeed, it took several failed attempts before it was finally climbed in 1906 by the German Wolfgang Koehler and two Swiss CPR guides, 16 years after another Rogers Pass icon, Mt. Sir Donald, was first conquered. In those days mountaineers were a special breed. They wore nailed boots and wool clothing with buttons that caught on sharp edges of rock. Rappelling hadn't been discovered yet; probably a good thing considering that ropes were made of hemp, which must have made them difficult to manage. On the other hand, Wolfgang Koehler and other early-day Roger's Pass mountaineers could conveniently use the Hermit trail and spend the night at the Hermit Hut, which is no longer available to today's mountaineers. A fairly steep but well used trail, the Hermit trail provides quick access to Hermit Meadows and the alpine beyond, about 2-3 hours each way, with no bushwhacking whatsoever.

Fresh snow covered the west faces of Sir Donald and Mt. Rogers when we arrived on Saturday morning after a smooth drive from Victoria and an overnight stop in Revelstoke. Because of the snow we decided not to commit to our original objective of the trip, Sir Donald. Our alternative plan, namely to instead attempt Mt. Tupper, was solidified by two competent young and knowledgeable rangers at the National Park Headquarters. Note to self: It is better to contact the rangers about route conditions than the clueless staff at the visitor centre.

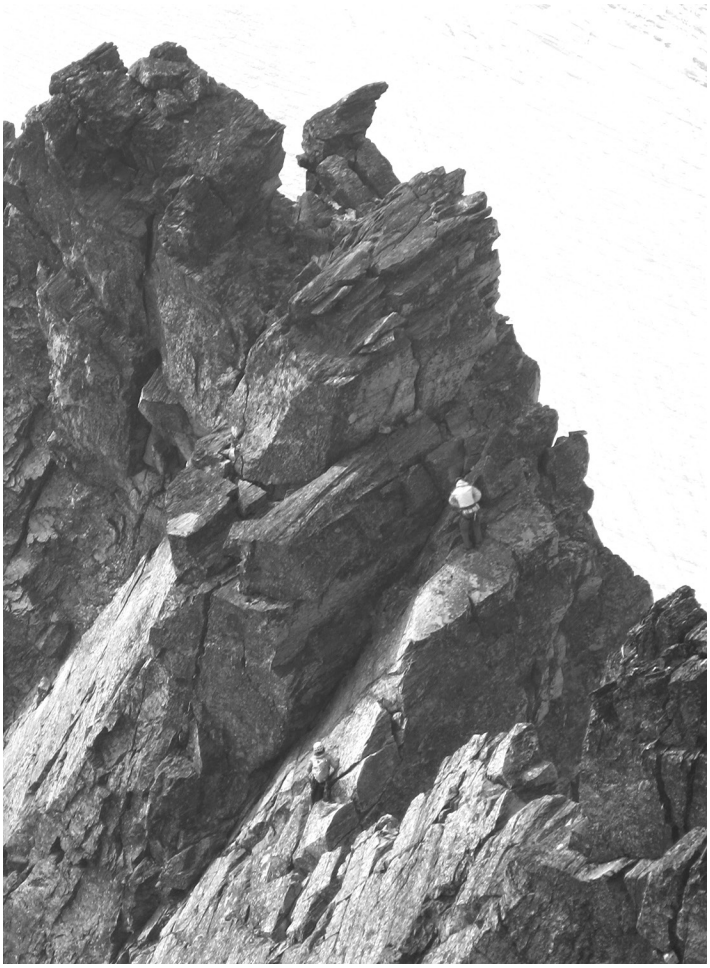
We were fortunate to get a permit for one of the last available sites at the Hermit Meadows campground. Apparently this is a popular weekend camping and hiking destination for Albertans. Bears do not seem to visit this area often, in contrast to the Sir Donald trail, which was only open to hiking parties of four or more people. Two adolescent grizzly bears had stalked hikers the previous day, with more human/bear encounters during the summer. Since we were only two on this trip, the only legal option for accessing Sir Donald would have been for us to join other hikers, which we tried after climbing Mt. Tupper, without success. With snow and bears conspiring against us, Sir Donald was just not in the cards for us this time.

Mt. Tupper summit tower southwest face and upper section of west ridge (bottom, left side). The last 5 pitches are close to the skyline, with the most difficult 2 pitches on lower section of the southwest face (slightly right of centre).

After a quiet and refreshing night at Hermit Meadows, we left the campsite at 7:00 a.m. on Sunday and reached the start of the west ridge of Mt. Tupper about 2 hours later, after some enjoyable hiking and scrambling in the bare terrain below the Tupper crest. Many different routes are possible below the crest but the best option seems to be the slope left of the prominent moraine, which we found on the way back.

If I was asked to compare the west ridge to music, I would pick Ravel's Boléro: Similar to this classic piece, the ridge evolves like a long, gradual crescendo: small pebbles are slowly replaced by bigger rocks and then large blocks on the hike up. Finally, a huge summit tower represents the climax of the route. The emphasis here is on "long" and "slow" because it took us 13 hours to do the entire climb from and to Hermit Meadows, much longer than indicated in the guide book. A mountain guide and her client that were just ahead of us during our climb were not much faster than we were. We reached the summit just as they started rappelling.

On our scramble along the ridge we eventually encountered big blocks of quarzite, which looked precariously balanced on top of each other. Here the ridge is very steep and narrow and so we decided to rope up. As we found out on the way back, it is more efficient to bypass this section by traversing just below the crest on the south side. Our first route-finding challenge was immediately followed by a few "au cheval" moves over a knife-blade ridge, with hundreds of meters of air on both sides of the ridge. Soon we were following excellent cracks and small ledges below the main gendarme ("the Hermit"), which brought us to a wide ledge at the base of the southwest face of the summit tower. Reinhard led the first pitch on the face. Unsure about details of the route, he decided to climb a corner on the left, with 2 small overhangs near the top of the pitch. We gave this pitch a rating of 5.8 to 5.9, harder than the overall 5.3-5.6 rating of the route according to the guidebook. Next, it was my turn to wonder about what was going on:



Looking west, back to the upper section of the west ridge, from the gendarme. The section between the climbers is where we did the "au cheval" moves. Ledges visible below the crest are somewhat easier than the top of the crest (top, left).

The 10 m chimney described in the guide book was rather obvious. I found it straightforward to place several nuts and cams. However, I had to commit to a few sketchy moves to get out of the top of the chimney, hoping that overhanging blocks somewhat higher up would provide the handholds that I was craving, which fortunately they did. Subsequently, Reinhard elegantly bypassed the top of the chimney by climbing out onto the face a bit below the crux. The latter seems to be the route that Wolfgang Koehler took on the first ascent after he and his guides had made several unsuccessful attempts to directly climb the chimney, as I found out later after reading their trip report (CAJ, 1909). Curiously, in his report Wolfgang Koehler claimed that building a big stone man at the summit as a visible proof of their success was the single biggest challenge of their trip.

Once we were past these difficulties, we unroped and climbed over large blocks and steps on the exposed northwest side, carefully avoiding small patches of slippery snow and mud here and there. We finally reached the start of the seventh and last pitch of the route. We were impressed by the huge exposure as we climbed the sharp ridge crest of the steep wall for about 30 m. The very solid rock permitted just enough gear placements for comfort. This last pitch is certainly the most beautiful pitch of the climb.

Unfortunately, views from the broad flat summit were not so impressive because of haze from forest fires in Washington and southern BC. We still took a few pictures, wrote in the summit register and started the descent, which follows the ascent route with only minor deviations. Bolted stations exist for most of the rappels and we did not encounter any notable difficulties on the way back to Hermit Meadows. Of course, we could have saved some time if I wasn't moving so slowly. Regrettably, my rock shoes were so tight so that I didn't feel comfortable going any faster. Note to self: Take better shoes next time.

Satisfied with our mountain adventure, we hiked out the following day and drove to Revelstoke. The next day we explored the Begbie Bluffs sport climbing area a few kilometres south of Revelstoke. This is rather an impressive crag with many high-quality sport climbing routes. A great guidebook can be purchased from Valhalla in Revelstoke. After spending a highly enjoyable morning there, we carried on to Shuswap Lake for an evening swim and car-camping. We were glad that we didn't have to rush back to Victoria after a very exciting and rewarding time in the mountains.

Participants: Knut von Salzen, Reinhard Illner

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SOUTH OF THE BORDER

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A Brief Guide to the Tetons

John Pratt

I thought that since I have now made six successful trips to this wonderful climbing area, and that I had thereby become something of an expert on it, I would share my knowledge with those ACCVI section members who would like to venture a little farther afield but not to the extent of anything as exotic as climbing in Mongolia.

As the indispensable Guide to the Tetons (Ortenburger and Jackson, the Mountaineers, Seattle) says, more or less everyone who climbs in the U.S. sooner or later visits the Tetons and ascends one or more of the high peaks. From a climber's point of view, they have every advantage; for apart from being remarkably beautiful (especially when viewed from the flat lands of Jackson Hole to the east), the access could hardly be more straightforward, the weather (in July and August) is, by mountain standards, pretty good and bureaucratic restrictions are minimal (mostly concerned with overnight/back-country permits). However, when I go anywhere now, I always like to be well informed by someone who is intimate with my proposed destination. So here goes:

(1) Transportation: Most likely you will want to fly, so Jackson Hole, Wyoming, is your airport. Set up a car rental ahead of time. You will need your own transportation as public transit is (a) time-consuming, (b) expensive, and (c) nonexistent. You won't need any macho trucks capable of handling BC-style logging roads. With just one exception (Death Canyon trailhead) the roads are level and well graded, and typically only a few km in length from the paved highway.

(2) Accommodation: I always stay at the Grand Teton Climbers' Ranch. This is bunk-style accommodation in cabins. You need your own sleeping-bag/pad, but it has shower and laundry facilities and big outdoor tables with electrical outlets for cooking, as well as a fine (and historic) lounge and reading room. American Alpine Club members get a discount, but not ACC. Nonetheless, it is still pretty cheap. If you want more luxurious quarters, you would need to go into Jackson, where these are available at a steep price – and you are much farther away from the mountains.

(3) Supplies, maps, books, restaurants: All are available in the small "town" (really nothing more than a row of stores and eating places) of Moose (on the way from the airport to the Climbers' Lodge). Here you can get all the groceries, maps*, basic supplies, gas, and so on you are likely to need. There is a good outdoor clothing/equipment shop there, and one can get excellent pizza and coffee. Down by the Snake River at the end of a path are some benches one can sit on, drink one's coffee, gaze up at the mountains and wave to the river-rafting parties who go barreling by, borne along by the powerful current.

(4) Guide services: I take the view that it may often be a good idea to take a guide on a climb that is either technically difficult or in a relatively remote area, or both. The premier guide service here is Exum Mountain Guides, which has its headquarters at Jenny Lake. These guides have mountaineering abilities a modest climber such as myself can only admire. Also, they seem to be good conversationalists, and generally very agreeable (with only one exception, in my long experience with them). Of course, these

The Jaw, 3475 m, east face

Cleaver Peak, 3370 m, west side (route ascends to right of prominent spike at left)

services do not come cheaply (especially with today's lousy exchange rate) but I cannot think of a single one of my experiences with them that has not been worth the money. One can give them a phone call and discuss what trips are available. I now just design my own, having long ago "climbed out" the major "must-dos" like the Grand Teton and Mt. Moran. I think I am now well known to them for choosing oddball objectives; typically these are first ascents for the guide as well (and in one instance he had not even heard of the peak!). Of course, the "Grand" is the premier objective for anyone who has not done it, and these trips tend to book up well ahead of time, but a few months' notice should be sufficient.

(5) What to climb: "Where do I begin?" is an easy question if this is your first time here. Far harder is: "OK, they're done: what now?" To take the easy one first, I would recommend the Grand Teton via the Exum Ridge. This can be done in one of two ways: either a scramble to the "Wall Street" ledge and then an ascent of the Upper Exum, or by doing the full ridge, including the far harder lower section. I did this latter, and even to follow it takes steady nerves! The classic Owen-Spalding route I do not know well, since, although it is the usual descent route, I cut half of it off with a 50-m rappel. Other destinations from the Garnet Canyon Trail are the Middle Teton (a pleasant scramble with a great summit view) and the long traverse from the South Teton to Nez Peruse Mountain, this latter generally done as an overnighter.

Moving farther north, a wonderful experience is the Teewinot-Owen traverse. Here, one climbs Teewinot's East face (class 4) and descends to a high saddle on the peak's west side, camps for the night and then continues on (much class 5 and a spectacular rappel) to Mt. Owen. This peak, not climbed until 1930, resisted several strong attempts and was the last of the high peaks to be ascended. One then descends the Koven route to a last overnight at a camp on the Teton Glacier moraine and the following morning exits via the beautiful Delta Lake to rejoin the trail.

Then there is the spectacular CMC route on Mt. Moran,

Rock of Age, 3321 m, East Chimneys Route behind prominent notch

the fourth highest peak in the Tetons. Here, one begins with two canoe rides – separated by a portage – followed by a long slog up to a lovely campsite. The next morning, one summits and is back at the canoes by late afternoon. The CMC route looks terrifying from below, the slabs appearing steep, smooth, and impossible, but the route is considerably easier than it looks. Amusingly, the "crux" of this climb is on the descent, as one has to climb a tower one rappelled off on the way up!

As for other destinations, one can take a boat across Jenny Lake and go up the beautiful Hanging Canyon (a modest climber's trail here only), which gives easy access to Cube Point (E. Ridge, 5.4), Rock of Ages (E. Chimneys, 5.6), the Jaw (E. Face, scramble) and Mt. St. John (5.1). Or one can go along the Cascade Canyon trail to Lake Solitude and on into more remote country. This year just gone I climbed Cleaver Peak by this approach. It was a great trip, but don't do it alone.

Other remote – or hard-to-reach – destinations are Thor Peak (lots of loose rock, but you have it all to yourself, and the bushwhacking won't be spoiled by crowds either), not to mention the country to the north, which is best approached by boat across Jackson Lake (I don't know this area at all). Delightful solo scrambles I did were Mt. Woodring and Rockchuck Peak, both accessible from the Indian Paintbrush Canyon trail. From the Death Canyon trail one can climb Static Peak (well-named, as it doesn't seem to have moved much at all recently) and Albright, both with fine views of Buck Mountain and the sea of sedimentary peaks to the south.

Maybe my next visit will be my last, but it seems a pity. My efforts to plan out more climbs there now have the unmistakably hollow sound of the bottom of a barrel being scraped, but it remains one of my favorite places on the planet and I should be sad if I never saw it again.

*I recommend the National Geographic map 202, Grand Teton N.P. Outdoor Recreation Map.

Weaver's Needle – Arizona

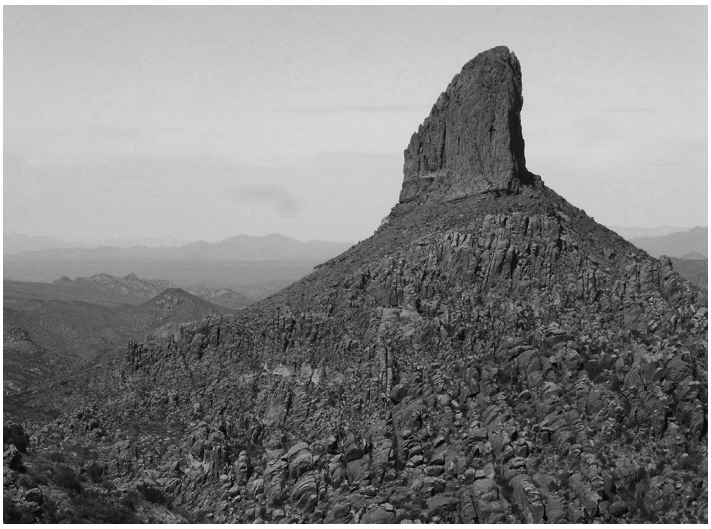
Lindsay Elms
March 23

Located in the heart of the Superstition Mountains to the east of Apache Junction in Arizona is the iconic Weaver's Needle. Weaver's Needle is the central feature in the story of the fabled Lost Dutchman Gold Mine. According to the legend, a German immigrant named Jacob Waltz discovered a mother lode of gold in the Superstition Wilderness and revealed its location on his deathbed in Phoenix in 1891 to Julia Thomas, a boarding-house owner who had taken care of him for many years. Several mines have been claimed to be the actual mine that Waltz discovered, but none of those claims have been verified. The Needle's shadow reportedly indicates the location of a rich vein of gold, and many treasure hunters have searched for it. The hunt for gold around Weaver's Needle has been pursued by hundreds (possibly thousands) of people.

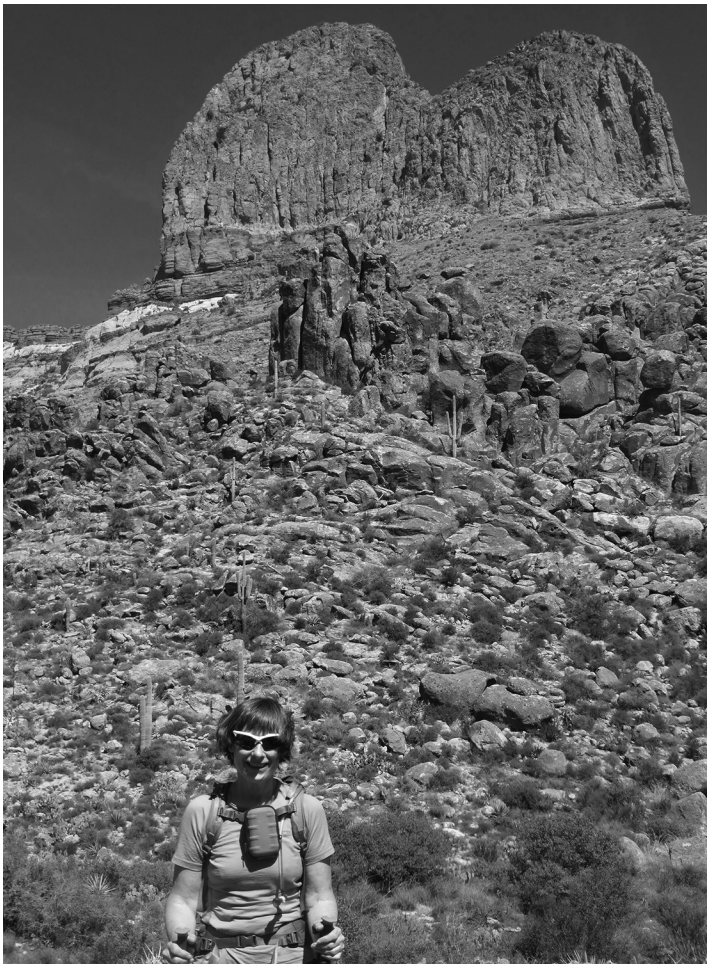
Ever since reading the story about the Lost Dutchman Gold Mine when I was 15, Weaver's Needle has been on my bucket list of peaks to climb. The funny thing is, I must have a big bucket list because it took me 42 years before I finally got around to climbing this distinctive peak.

Weaver's Needle is a 300-metre column of rock towering above the desert landscape and it forms a distinctive peak visible for many miles around. Weaver's Needle was created when a thick layer of tuff (fused volcanic ash) was heavily eroded, creating the spire as an erosional remnant. It is set in a desert landscape of cactus and mesquite bush, with large Saguaro cacti particularly prominent. The peak was named after Pauline Weaver.

Pauline Weaver was an American mountain man, trapper,



Weaver's Needle from Fremont Saddle (Photo: Valerie Wootton)



Val below the West face of Weaver's Needle (Photo: Lindsay Elms)

military scout, prospector, and explorer who was active in the early Southwestern United States. Weaver was born Powell Weaver, the son of a white father and a Cherokee mother. As a young man he worked for the Hudson's Bay Company in Canada. In 1830 he traveled to the Rocky Mountains with a group of nearly 50 other men on a trapping expedition. The trip took him to Taos, New Mexico where his given name *Powell* was changed to *Paulino* by Spanish speakers which in turn was changed to *Pauline* by English speakers. In 1831 he traveled from Taos to California. During the 40's and 50's Weaver lived amongst the indigenous peoples of the region, and consistently tried to smooth relations between them and the American settlers. In 1862 Native Americans showed Weaver where gold could be found on the east side of the Colorado River. Despite the usually good relationship, Weaver was seriously wounded in an Indian attack and died from the injuries in 1867.

With these stories in mind, Val and I headed up the Peralta Trail towards Fremont Saddle, where I knew I would get my first glimpse of Weaver's Needle (1388 m). I was like a young kid with a new toy. I could have run the trail to the saddle if Val had let me, and on the last stretch to the saddle I was suffering from 'horizonitis!' When we reached the saddle an hour and a half after leaving the trailhead, I wasn't disappointed. There in front of me was the classic view of the needle. Now we had to get over to the base of the peak and climb it!

We continued down the trail past Pinon Camp and then found a rough climber's trail which took us across the wash and up an open boulder hillside to the bottom of the west chimney ravine. After some scrambling up some slabs we entered the narrowing chimney, where we found several permanent anchors. The rope stayed in my pack as we climbed the first pitch, which ends at a ledge on the left wall about 30 metres up. The second pitch (mid 5th class) continued up the steepening gully to a large chockstone blocking the exit. Again the rope stayed in my pack but on hindsight we should have been roped due to the exposure (next time). Val chose to climb around it on the right on small but secure holds while I squeezed underneath the chockstone, both arriving at the notch between the two summits. The trail continued up the north side of the notch to what is known as the 4th pitch up a "juggy crack" to a horn which can be used as an anchor. A short distance beyond was the summit, where I finally fulfilled my dream. I soaked up the view, revelling in the beauty of the desert – terrain that we are not familiar with on the island. I looked around taking in the 360-degree view, wondering if the fabled Lost Dutchman gold mine was really out there. Maybe I could find it!

We spent an hour on the summit before beginning the descent. We had started up the trail early in the morning (day break) to beat the heat because by mid-morning the heat can become intense. There was no water along the route at this time of the year so we had to pack in what we needed. I knew that if we were climbing in the heat of the day we would probably want to carry and drink more water.

At the chockstone we both crawled underneath and I set up a rappel off a belay bolt. I had bought a light 30-m rope in Phoenix especially for the climb and found that it was just long enough to get us to the ledge. The second rappel, off a conveniently located bush which reminded me of rappels back at home on the island, was short by about 3 m but we could down climb the last little bit safely. Here I put the rope away and scrambled to the top of the slabs, where we met two others who were umming and ahhing about whether to continue as they weren't carrying a rope. We continued down the route, across the hillside and reached the trail that heads back up to Fremont Saddle. At midday Fremont Saddle was literally crawling with hikers, as was the trail all the way back down to the trailhead. Obviously a lot of people (maybe they are immune to the heat) don't care, or just aren't aware, of the temperatures on the trail at this time of the year.

I was buzzing all the way down the trail and the beers that evening tasted especially good! It felt good to finally complete a dream I had held on to for so long.

Participants: Lindsay Elms and Valerie Wootton.

Mt. Angeles: Bike-Hike-Swim

Dave Suttill
August 9

Mt. Angeles makes for a spectacular day trip from Victoria. It pretty well requires going when the summer ferry schedule is in effect, taking the 6:10 a.m. ferry over and returning on the last ferry at 9:30 that evening. A 12-km bike ride, much of it at a steady 6% grade, takes you from the ferry terminal to the start of the Mt. Angeles Trail by the park entrance gate. This takes between 1 hr 10 min and 1 hr 30 min depending on your fitness level. One then has to transition from cycling mode to hiking mode and stash the bikes in the forest.

We started up the trail at 9:30 a.m. After about .25 km of gentle climbing, the trail passes by a US Geological Survey Bench Mark which gives the elevation as 1957 feet (~596 m). The trail now starts angling up the increasingly steep north ridge of Mt. Angeles. Soon it begins to switchback up through the forest. In a little under an hour we reached Halfway Rock (1140 m) which is the first real viewpoint. We took a brief rest at the nearby site of the Halfway Shelter. All that is left of the shelter is a piece of flat ground cut into the hillside. From here the trail continues up the ridge another 230 m vertical before contouring around the east side of the ridge below First Top, the first of several prominent peaks along the ridge leading to the summit. Another half hour took us to the head of a minor drainage coming off the north slope of Second Top. We were more than pleased to find it had not dried up, as this was an incredibly dry summer. Here the terrain begins to open out into a subalpine meadow known as Heather Park. If you are not in too much of a hurry, you will discover the remains of a huge stone chimney and lower portions of a wall of what must have been a lodge a little uphill from this point. It is easy to miss if you focus your attention on the ridge top 20 minutes ahead.

Climbing over one of the rock ribs below the East Summit of Mt. Angeles (Photo: Dave Suttill)

East summit Mt. Angeles (left) from west summit. Klahhane ridge middle distance centre (Photo: Roxanne Stedman)

The trail crosses over the open ridge top at Heather Pass. If this is your first visit, it is well worth the 10 minutes it takes to hike up to the viewpoint south toward First Top. After the briefest of rests we continued down the trail on the west side of the pass before contouring south below the Second Top. It should be noted that the north ridge of Mt. Angeles is a series of pointy bumps that don't really sort themselves out into two distinct peaks or tops. This section of trail passes above a prominent rock outcrop called The Thumb before regaining the north ridge at a second pass, below the east summit of Mt. Angeles. From here the trail drops down the east side for almost 100 m vertical before contouring along the east slope of Mt. Angeles, then angling steeply up to Victor Pass (1780 m) on Klahhane Ridge.

This pass gets its name from Victor Smith who was prominent in the establishment of the town of Port Angeles. It was named during Lt. O'Neil's 1885 explorations of the Olympic Mountains. Klahhane Ridge gets its name from a Chinook term having something to do with it being a nice place in the mountains. At Victor Pass one needs to take stock of the time. If you get there much later than 3:30 p.m. it is best to forego the side trip to Mt. Angeles' summit if you want to make the last ferry. We were there by 1 p.m. so we had plenty of time.

We followed the ridge west, scrambling up the steeply tilted beds of basalt and breccia of Mt. Angeles' east side. We arrived at the 1958 m East Summit at 1:15. From there it is an interesting .3 km scramble along the connecting ridge to the slightly higher 1967 m west summit. In places you squeeze between vertical rock along the narrow ridge line. In one spot there is a three-metre fourth class bit of rock to get by. It took us half an hour to get over to the west summit. We returned by a different route, heading down a gully on the south side of the summit ridge. This gully is getting harder to go down as the loose foot holds get eroded with increased use. We pretty much followed a route we had used on previous trips, angling down toward Victor Pass. From here we followed the well-defined Lake Angeles Trail

along Klahhane Ridge. The trail more or less follows the ridge line for 2 km before dropping down the north side toward Lake Angeles. The geology up there is a real mix of volcanic and sedimentary. Where the trail leaves the ridge, the surface vegetation has eroded, exposing a 20-m wide area of sand. Nearby on the uphill side was a portable solar-powered device with a 3 m aerial. We speculated that it might be for environmental monitoring or communication.

We headed down off the ridge at 3:20. The first part of the trail goes through a relatively flat alpine meadow. At its low point there is a watercourse which had completely dried up. After this the trail follows a spur ridge which forms the west wall of Lake Angeles. The 500 m long lake is nestled in by major bluffs and cliffs on three sides. We arrived at the lakeside campsite at 4 p.m. with the lake still in sunshine. I figured that this was probably the warmest the lake had been in years so I elected to brave a swim. We lingered about before heading down the excellent trail to the parking lot. By 6:10 we were back on the bikes for the exhilarating 20 minute downhill ride back to town.

Participants: Roxanne Stedman, Dave Suttill

Going For It – A Solo Adventure

Chris Istace
November 28 – December 11

The outdoors and all its beauty with the wild and freedom it offers is a powerful energy for the soul. Exploring new places, meeting new people keeps us energized and feeling alive; don't let this light burn dim for you.

Over the last year, mostly due to my social media friendships made and the conversations that followed, I made a mental list of places that I badly wanted to see first in person.

Near the end of summer the holiday policy with my employer changed and it was stated that we couldn't carry over any unused vacation days. With this new policy and the fact that I had a substantial bank of days due to being more of a weekend warrior for my hikes and climbs, I decided on using up two weeks straight in the fall.

With two weeks coming to me, I looked at my options and decided on a road trip throughout the Western United States. I presented my game-plan to the wife and she was very supportive (she really is the best) of my ambitious plans. A solo adventure would allow me to attack the trip in a manner with no set boundaries, no worries of what others wanted to see or do, achieve as little or as much in a single day and to pick objectives within my comfort zone or physical challenge.

The following will be a recap of my trip starting from my home on Vancouver Island. I will cover the locations I visited, driving routes and all my costs to help show you that it's as easy as just pointing your car a direction and going for it.

I planned to travel in a nomadic or "dirtbag" manner living out of my Hyundai Santa Fe, tenting as required and cooking all my meals out of the car. This allowed traveling affordably and helped with my loose-laid travel itinerary. In this trip review all costs will be in US funds for ease, being that almost the entire trip occurred there.

Day 1 – The trip would start on Saturday, November 28. Leaving my town of Chemainus on Vancouver Island at 8 a.m., I headed to Victoria to catch the Coho Ferry to Port Angeles at 10:30 a.m. I started the day at 140,330 km with the first cost being $68 for my fare and breakfast as we sailed. As soon as I arrived in Port Angeles, Washington, I headed out on Hwy 101 south to Olympia, with my first stop at a Walmart to get food supplies, stove fuel and some batteries for my headlamp for $63. Once at Olympia I joined up on the I-5 south to Portland, Oregon, where I would begin heading east on the I-84 towards Idaho, making a few fuel stops along the way. I wished I hit this spot during daylight hours as seeing Mt. St. Helens and Mt. Hood would have been a treat. I pushed on, reaching a rest stop just past Baker City near the Oregon/Idaho border at 10:45 p.m. I would sleep here for the night at 141,240 km, a solid day at 910 km and $65.50 in fuel stops.

Day 2 – I awoke and hit the road at roughly 5:45 a.m., quickly crossing into Idaho; my first stop would be in Twin Falls as I wanted to see the Perrine Bridge on Hwy 93 south as I turned off I-84 at 11:30 a.m. The bridge is 1500 ft across and 486 ft over the Snake River. I saw photos of Shoshone Falls here prior to my trip so I stopped and hiked down to the falls as a break from driving also. I would leave Twin Falls at about 2:30 p.m. and head south to Wells, Nevada as I wanted to escape the Interstate and see more remote areas. The drive was beautiful and I was glad I made this choice. The East Humboldt Mountains over Wells looked magnificent and here I would head east again on I-80. The second reason I chose this route was the link-up would take me to West Wendover and home of an incredible abandoned US Air Force base.

Wendover Airfield housed 19,500 military personnel at its height in 1943 and was the home of the Enola Gay B-29 Superfortress bomber that carried the atomic bomb to Hiroshima. When my exploration was done and a quick stop at McDonald's ($5) for the free wifi, I headed only a few miles west to the Bonneville Salt Flats, as Wendover sits right on the Nevada/Utah border. It was dark out but I did drive out to where the Bonneville race area starts and enjoyed a star-filled sky. I then pulled back onto the Interstate and drove to the outskirts of Salt Lake City, where I found a parking lot to stop in and sleep at 10 p.m., at 142,207 km for a total of 967 km, another solid day with $44 fuel and $10 for a US road atlas.

Day 3 – I woke up from my luxurious parking lot hotel and

Delicate Arch enjoyed during Sunset at Arches National Park (Photo: Chris Istace)

Mesa Arch with a memorable sunrise at CanyonLands National Park (Photo: Chris Istace)

finished my drive through Salt Lake City, linking up to the I-15 and heading south to Spanish Fork, where Starbucks would supply some wifi time to catch up on social media posts and upload my photos so far to my laptop. Six dollars later I would head east on Hwy 89 and then Hwy 6 at roughly 10:30 a.m. This route would be taking me to the I-70, where I would then drop south again on Hwy 191 for my goal of the day: the Moab region where Arches and Canyonlands National parks call home. Explore the parks yourself online on the National Park websites at Arches National Park (http://www.nps.gov/arch/index.htm) and CanyonLands National Park (http://www.nps.gov/cany/index.htm).

I made my way directly to Arches National Park Visitor Centre, where I bought a National Park pass for $80 (amazing price, it gets you into every US National Park for a full year). It was now 4 p.m., so I quickly made my way to Delicate Arch within the park to catch a sunset at this incredible spot. I quickly made the 2.4-km hike and set up to relax and enjoy mind-blowing conditions for sunset; this spot was on my must-do list for the trip and was incredible. I enjoyed the spot and chatted with others; they said, in the morning the best sunrise would be Mesa Arch in Canyonlands. After the sun set, I hiked out and got back to the car in the dark; this was perfect as while driving out, I got some great night sky views and shots. I made my way to Moab at about 6 p.m. for fuel and some McDonald's wifi action ($8). I then headed back north to Canyonlands and found a spot out of view to sleep for the night at about 11:30 p.m. at 142,595 km, for 388 km and $56 in fuel/carwash. Wow, what a third day, stoked for the days to come!

Day 4 – I woke up from a great sleep but a very cold morning, glad I packed my Marmot downslide –10 bag, as it hit those temps at night in SW Utah. It was 6:30 a.m., I had a short drive to reach the trailhead for Mesa Arch, and sunrise was approaching fast. I hiked down to the arch, but I was in no way prepared for the surreal beauty of this spot, hands-down the most photos of any one spot I took. The changing colours from dark, to sunrise and then to the sun higher in the sky, are indescribable.

At 9 a.m. I went back to the car, made breakfast and coffee, then drove back out of the Canyonlands National Park after stopping at some of the viewpoints, and then made my way back to Arches National Park to hike the Devil's Garden Trail, where the largest arches within the park are found. I hustled the trail to Sandcut Arch quickly and then I started on the trail at 1 p.m. and would hike to Landscape Arch, Partition and then Navajo Arch followed by the long hike to the end of the trail for Double O Arch. This trail was incredible, as I enjoyed perfect hiking weather of 5º Celsius with bluebird skies and sunshine. I couldn't imagine doing it in the sweltering heat of summer in 40º C weather. The other huge fact that would be prevalent through my trip is ZERO crowds. I barely ran into people and those I did run into were doing as I was, solo adventure touring. I can't recommend this time of year enough. After 6.4 km of hiking and soaking up the great views, I made it back to the car at 4 p.m. I would drive back to the Visitor Centre and then south to Moab for fuel and that MickeyD's free wifi again ($8). I then drove south on Hwy 191 until I reached the rest stop at Kane Springs to sleep for the night. Not much driving today as I finished at 142,857 km for 262 km with $18 in fuel.

Day 5 – Up early from a very cold night: it hit –12º overnight and know it was cold as my water bottles nearly froze solid. I made some oatmeal and coffee after a posh rest-stop-bathroom micro-fibre cloth shower – oh, the good times of being on the road. I hit the road again at 8 a.m., making my way south on Hwy 191. I stopped at Blanding, where I went to a grocery store for more food ($16) and some fuel. I headed west of Hwy 95 from here heading to Natural Bridges National Monument. Along the way I spotted a tiny sign and pull-out for Butler Wash Ruins. From here I would hike into the hidden cave-dwelling ruins over 700 years old.

Once done exploring the ruins I carried on back to the highway to Natural Bridges, reaching the National Monument site at noon. I couldn't believe another beautiful day and this amazing place, and only seeing 6 other people. I drove to the viewpoints for Sipapu and Kachina Natural Bridges first and then hit Owachomo trail to explore the nicest natural bridge, in my mind.

I left the park at 2 p.m. and backtracked to Hwy 261 to head south towards Arizona via the Moki Dugway, a crazy gravel section of the highway that switchbacks down 1200 feet in 3 miles to the Valley of the Gods and the town of Mexican Hat. I made it to Mexican Hat, where I would connect with Hwy 163 heading southbound to Arizona and through Monument Valley, which was on my to-do list. This area is most notably known for where Forest Gump stopped his cross country run alongside the highway. Many other movies and classic westerns were filmed here.

After getting my shots, I hit the road again. I would mention that if you are heading south, I think sunrise or mid-morning would give you the great photos and views of the Monument hoodoos as you won't be shooting into the sun. I continued south on Hwy 163 to Kayente, Arizona, where I hit McDonald's as usual to upload my photos from the day and use the free wifi plus buy a supper ($9). I then left town, connecting to Hwy 160 south, which would take me to Hwy 98 and then back north to Page, Arizona, where I planned to stop for the night. I found McDonald's ($8) where I had a bedtime ice cream treat and surfed a few websites to plan my next few days, and then found the Walmart parking lot to sleep for the night at 10:30 p.m. I finished the day at 143,329 km, which knocked off 472 km and $21 in fuel.

Day 6 – I spent the night in Page, Arizona, so that I could catch sunrise at Horseshoe Bend on the Colorado River just south of the city on Hwy 89. I got up, made coffee and my oatmeal, hitting the road at 6:30 a.m. The size of the river valley isn't done any justice by the photos and was a great view. I then got back on the road to head north from Page, stopping quickly at Glen Canyon Dam, which blocks the Colorado River and created Lake Powell. After taking a few photos I got back in the car and worked back into Utah up to Kanab and then Mt. Carmel Junction, where I went north on Hwy 89 to get to Bryce Canyon, turning onto Hwy 12 and passing through Red Canyon to Bryce Canyon City at 12:30 p.m. I got my park map from the visitor centre (Bryce Canyon NPS website http://www.nps.gov/brca/index.htm) and off I went to Sunset Point to park and begin my day hike.

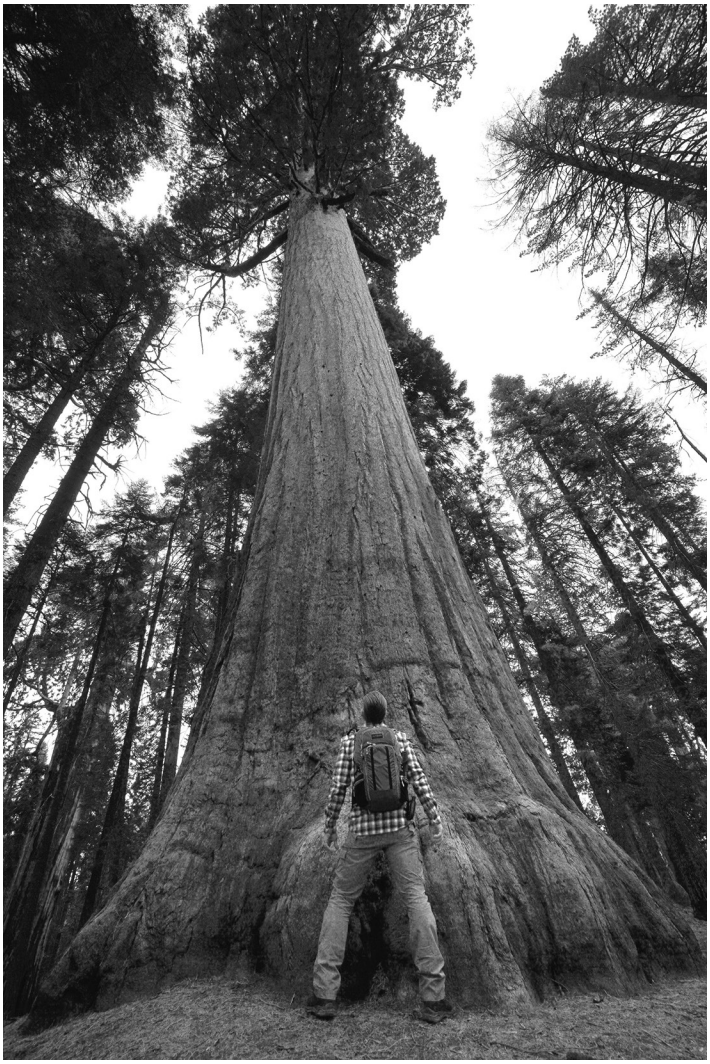
As I left the car and walked to the viewpoint I was literally astounded: never have I seen something like this place.... once again photos do nothing to grasp the size and beauty. I then set out on my hike, going from Sunset Point to Sunrise Point and then dropping down on the Queen's Garden Trail, followed up by connecting to Navajo Loop trail. The hike would take me from the canyon rim down into the bottom of the valley and back up over a short 5 km and 183 m elevation gain. After I finished the hike I made lunch at a picnic table, relaxing in sunshine and about 4 degrees Celsius, and once again nearly had the park to myself. I then drove to Inspiration and Bryce Points to get the final views of the Canyon before heading back on the road at 5 p.m.

I drove back down to Mt. Carmel Junction and turned on the incredible Highway 9 through Zion on its famous red asphalt and 1.7-km tunnel portal through the mountain into the park (built in 1930). Once again I drove a section in the dark that I will have to return to in the future to see during the day. I made my way through to Zion so I could reach Hurricane for the night to grab some fuel and food/wifi at McDonald's ($5). I found a secluded parking lot to stay for the night at around 10:30 p.m. Total day knocked out 443 km even with all my stops, ending at 143,772 km with $34 on fuel.

Day 7 – Today was the one hike I had been waiting for since the beginning of my trip and I couldn't wait to get started. I left Hurricane at roughly 7 a.m. and drove back to Zion to my fifth National park in Utah – learn more why this is a must-stop on the NPS site at http://www.nps.gov/zion/index.htm. I stopped at the visitor centre and then made my way to the Grotto parking area, which is the start of the trail to Angel's Landing. At 9 a.m. I set out on the trail, with only 2 others in sight, a far cry from what I'm told about summer, where this park sees 3 million visitors annually. The trail switchbacks out of the river valley and then through a drainage gully before starting the long winding hike up to the side of Angel's Landing, to the top bluff where the ridge begins and the exposed hike to the summit of Angels Landing is reached.

I enjoyed the summit with only 3 others in sight, when I met Luke Barber, who called my name out: it's an odd occurrence having someone asking if you are "Chris" when you are thousands of kilometres from home. Luke lives on Vancouver Island and knows me from my Instagram account. We enjoyed the summit with Molly, who was a park ranger road tripping as well; it was nice hanging with a few people after seven days by myself. We got our photos and hiked down back to our vehicles and went on our way at 2 p.m. The weather was a beautiful 12º C and great for a 9.5 km hike with 531 m elevation gain. I left Zion, heading back through Hurricane and connecting back onto the I-15 to head south into Nevada and onto Las Vegas. The craziness of the city was not what I was after so I just stopped for a quick snack and wifi, then back on the road to catch fuel at Prim and a latté ($7). Still wanting to get further into California, I pushed on until Barstow, finding a parking lot near the shopping centre to sleep for the night at 11:30 p.m. I finished the day at 144,350 km for 577 km and $38 in fuel.

Day 8 – After a busy first week I would take it easy and sleep in with the warm temperatures in Barstow, getting to finally put on shorts. I went over to Starbucks and relaxed all morning uploading photos and having breakfast ($10) with the free wifi. I fueled up and hit the road towards the Sacramento Valley at 12:30 p.m., leaving the I-15 for Hwy 58 west and turning on Hwy 99 at Bakersfield to begin going north. I turned at Visalia onto Hwy 198, which would take me into Sequoia National Park. Once in the park I went to Potiwash Campground, as it was the only tent site ($22) open in winter and I set up my tent at 6 p m. I enjoyed a good meal and went to sleep in my tent shortly after. This was an easy day, ending at 144,737 km for 387 km and $48 fuel.



Giant sequoias towering above Chris Istace at Sequoia National Park (Photo: Chris Istace)

Day 9 – I woke up at 7 a.m. and made a nice breakfast, enjoyed some coffee and then headed back down to the visitor centre to get some park info and maps for Sequoia Kings Canyon NPS (http://www.nps.gov/seki/index.htm). From the visitor centre, I drove up the beautiful tight and twisty General's Highway to the Sequoia Museum and parked for my hike. I visited the museum first and then hit the trail at 9 a.m. I would hike Moro Rock trail to Soldier's trail and then Alta Trail back to the trailhead. I covered 10.5 km with 406 m elevation gain over 3.5 hours, seeing views of the Sierra Nevada mountains and the largest sequoia trees in the world, including the General Sherman tree (the world's largest tree by volume).

I continued from Sequoia in Kings Canyon side of the park and chatted with the rangers in the visitor centre at Grant's Grove, doing the hike loop to the Grant Tree. I left the park at 4 p.m., driving out on the General's Highway (198) then turning onto Hwy 180 to Fresno. I stopped at Starbucks for coffee ($9) and wifi after a long day. I finished my coffee and made my way to Oakhurst on Hwy 41, fueling up and then grabbing some groceries ($15). I found a secluded corner of the mall parking lot and snuggled into my down bag for the night in the Hyundai Hotel as I had now named my car. End of day had me at 144,982 km for 245 km and $27 fuel.

Day 10 – I crawled out of my sleeping bag and hit the road at 7:30 a.m., heading out of Oakhurst on Hwy 41 towards an exciting stop, Yosemite. I finally reached the tunnel carved through the mountain that opens up to the famous tunnel view as you exit into the beautiful Yosemite Valley.

I drove into the valley in awe of El Capitan and views of Yosemite Falls. I made my first stop at Bridal Veil Falls, a beautiful view at 586 ft in height. I then made my way to the visitor centre at noon to see the museum, and then to the village for groceries ($12). Much like the other parks, it being winter there were very few people visiting and I could drive right into all the areas in the park.

I made my way to Happy Isles parking lot and hiked to the trailhead at 12:30 p.m. I hiked up to Vernal Fall (317 ft tall) and then up to Nevada Fall (594 ft tall) via the winter route and Clarke Point. The views of Liberty Cap peak and the back of Half Dome were the backdrop to the hike. I returned to the car at 4:30 p.m. covering 16 km and approximately 610 m cumulative elevation gain. I drove back to the village centre parking lot to make a quick supper and then left Yosemite at 6 p.m. via Hwy 140 west to Merced, turning north on the I-5 to Modesto. I would get a hotel room ($55) here for a much-needed shower and warm bed for the night at 10 p.m. The odometer rolled over at 145,264 km for 282 km and $26 fuel.

Day 11 – Waking up from a bed and that hot shower was great, as I left the hotel and wandered over to Starbucks for some wifi to catch up on social media updates and upload photos to my laptop. I enjoyed breakfast and coffee ($12) and then set out from Modesto at 10:30 a.m., heading north on Hwy 99 to I-205 and then I-580 into Oakland, and then onto I-80 across the Bay Bridge into San Francisco at noon. I drove through this beautiful city, which I now must actually visit, making my way to and across the Golden Gate Bridge.

I stopped and got some photos at Vista Point and then headed across to Marin Headlands National Park to get more views of the Bay area and the Golden Gate Bridge. The interesting part of the park is that it is home to the abandoned military bases that guarded San Francisco at the turn of the century and into the 1960s, as well as the 150-year-old Bonita Lighthouse. After touring around the park until 3 p.m. I headed north again on US Hwy 101, making it as far as Trinidad Rest Stop just north of Eureka at 10:30 p.m. I really put some distance on the ground this day, ending at 145,908 km for 644 km and $30 fuel.

Day 12 – I woke up at 8:15 am and headed back north on Hwy 101 making my way to Redwoods National Park (http://www.nps.gov/redw/index.htm) enjoying the drive as the highway now skirted along the west coast and Pacific Ocean. I reached Crescent City at 11 a.m. and went to the visitor centre, where the ranger told me to drive the Howland Hill Road, an old stagecoach trail, now a sin-

Yosemite Valley tunnel view at Yosemite National Park (Photo: Chris Istace)

gle-lane dirt road, deep into the forest. It took me to Stout Grove, where I was able to hike amongst a rainforest of huge redwoods.

After enjoying the forest I drove back to Hwy 101 and made my way north into Oregon, stopping at places like Whalesshead beach at 1 p.m. and other various beautiful views along the route. Unfortunately, the farther I went north the worse the weather got, so I left Hwy 101, turning east on Hwy 126 at Florence and reaching Eugene at 8 p.m. to stop and get weather reports and coffee/food ($12) as well as fuel. I decided to push north on the I-5 to Portland as the weather was getting bad, with extreme rainfall warnings in effect. I passed through Portland and stayed at a rest stop just north of the city at 12 p.m. I stopped at 146,628 km, logging 718 km and $53 fuel.

Day 13 – I just realized as I type this story that my craziest day was lucky #13 – funny now that I look back on this. I started the day at 6:30 a.m. and left the rest stop, heading north on the I-5 until I hit a detour and roadblock only after a short drive. The heavy rain created a mudslide and blocked all three lanes of northbound traffic with no way around. Traffic crawled at a snail's pace as I slowly made the detour, turned around, stopped to get on my laptop and grab breakfast ($10) and to find a way around and out of here. I headed back south on I-5 into Portland to turn west on Hwy 30 and the only other bridge that crosses the Columbia River at Rainier and across the Lewis and Clark Bridge into Longview.

Finally making the bridge, I grabbed some Subway, thankfully right beside the road. At 6 p.m. and 12 hours later, clocking only nearly 100 km !! , I was back just north of the blocked section of I-5 heading north to Seattle. I hit Seattle at 9 p.m. for Starbucks ($10); of course – it is the home of the company – LOL. I fuelled up and then headed to the Canadian border to reach the Tsawwassen Ferry and sleep for the night at 11 p.m. My night ended at 147,195 km with 589 km and $45 fuel. Crazy day for not seeing any sights or hiking!

Day 14 – I woke up and boarded the 5:15 a.m. ferry ($55) from Tsawwassen to Duke Point, making my final stretch back home across the water. The ferry docked and I made my way down to Chemainus, returning home at roughly 8:30 a.m. and with the final odometer reading of 147,232 km.

My trip was over and it was a whirlwind to decompress all the amazing places I saw and experienced along the way. This solo trip was a great time to be with yourself and reflect on your life and plans for the future as well as creating an urge to do this again as soon as possible. I really hoped to see more of Oregon but that will just have to wait for another adventure.

My GPS said I logged 6787 km with a total of 83 hours moving in the vehicle; it really didn't seem like that much and some impressive numbers. After the exchange rate to Canadian, my total cost including the 2 ferry crossings and the National Park pass was approximately $700. A great bargain of a price when your goal isn't extravagance but rather exploring new places and the beautiful outdoors.

There is so much to see and do out there, so next time, rather than looking at that expensive commercial tourist trap trip, consider something "Beyond the Usual".

Thanks for sharing my trip with me!

Participant: Chris Istace

Mt. Carrie, Gateway to the Bailey Range

Dave Suttill
August 17 – 20

We boarded the 6:10 a.m. sailing of the MV Coho bound for Port Angeles. As soon as we cleared Victoria harbour we could see our final destination behind the gap in the Olympic Mountains formed by the Elwha River. Where the Elwha valley turns east, the valley of Cat Creek continues along your line of sight, aiming straight for Mt. Olympus. The prominent white snowfields of Mt. Carrie, easily confused with Olympus itself, form the left side of the gap. From our vantage point, Cat Peak formed the right-hand side of the gap. The bottom of the gap forms the Cat Walk

where our base camp would be. About half way across the Juan de Fuca Strait we saw a pair of grey whales off to our right. We wondered if they were the same pair we saw a week earlier on a day trip to Mt. Angeles.

After clearing customs in Port Angeles, we headed for the Park Visitor Centre to get our wilderness permit and bear-proof food canisters. The area we were going to, the Bailey Range, is pretty much off the map as far as regular backcountry travel is concerned. The ranger advised us that water might be a problem in the high country due to the previous winter's low snow pack and the recent prolonged period of dry weather. There was water in the Cat Basin so that would be the first stop on our official itinerary. We then headed off to the Sol Duc Trailhead and were hiking by 10:00 a.m. For 8 km we followed the well-constructed trail up the old-growth valley bottom of the Sol Duc River to gain a total of 380 m. At 1 p.m. the trail headed steeply south up Bridge Creek, near the headwaters of the Sol Duc. It took another 1.5 hours to hike up past Heart Lake to get to the High Divide Trail, a climb of 500 m over 4 km.

We followed the Cat Basin Primitive Trail east along the divide between the Hoh River and Elwha River drainages. After 1.5 km we came to the Cat Basin Stock Camp, the end of the maintained trail. As it was only 3 p.m. we thought we would continue closer to our real objective, a very scenic but dry campsite overlooking the Cat Walk, a further 4.5 km. We had a 10-litre collapsible water container that, if full, would comfortably see us through the next 24 hours. The guidebook indicated there was a small water source 15 m below the trail 1 km short of this campsite so we elected to chance it. About half way along we came across a young man wearing camouflage who was traveling extremely light. Roxanne named him Camo Man. He had just returned from a day hike attempt of Mt. Carrie from his Cat Basin camp. He had turned back when he came to a gully that he said was really scary. This did not sound good. We asked him about water and he said the only water was a dirty pond just the other side of the Cat Walk but did not recommend using it. He further indicated that crossing the Cat Walk with backpacks would be a dangerous proposition. We thanked him and continued another 100 m to a nice bear-grass-covered knoll beside the trail to consider our options. We decided to turn back and camped part way down Cat Basin a little above an excellent flowing creek coming in from the northwest. Cat Basin, Cat Peak and Cat Creek all get their name from a bobcat that was killed at the junction of this creek with the Elwha River by the (Seattle) Press Expedition of 1889–1890. The creek was originally referred to as Wildcat Creek.

The next morning around 7 a.m., while we were eating breakfast, a nanny goat and her kid strolled past camp and wandered around for a while before heading off downhill in the direction of our creek. We reconsidered our itinerary and decided to make for the Cat Walk overlook camp and use it as our base camp for the next two nights. In anticipation of the need for clear potable water I filled up my collapsible water container at Cat Creek. We arrived at

Looking southeast across Fairchild Glacier to Ruth Peak from Mt Carrie (Photo: Roxanne Stedman)

our Cat Walk camp at 11 a.m. On the way we saw absolutely no sign of the water source that the hiking guide had indicated along the way, so I did not begrudge the extra 10 kg of water I was carrying one bit. By noon we started out for Mt. Carrie. From here on it was a goat trail quite literally. Another 20 minutes saw us safely across the Cat Walk, a class three traverse, to Boston Charlie's camp. This was a small flat area at the far end of the arête and the start of Mt. Carrie proper. The pond there was maybe 4 m by 10 m and a nice tea colour. There was room for several tents, though you would have been hard pressed to find a comfortable spot. The camp is named for Boston Charlie, the last medicine man of the Klallum people, who often camped here while roaming in the mountains at the turn of the last century. He got the name Boston because he adopted many of the white man's ways.

The route up Mt. Carrie continued along the trail another 200 m to about the 1700 m level before heading straight up the west ridge. The going was mostly on grassy slopes to about 1900 m, where the ridge got more and more rocky. At about 2000 m the goat trail/climber's trail leaves the ridge on the south side and traverses a steep bowl made up of fine scree. It regains the west ridge about 200 m short of the summit for the final easy scramble to the top.

The views were stupendous from about the 1800-m level on. You could see the Pacific Ocean to the west, Vancouver Island to the north, even Mt Baker peeking over Klahhane Ridge by Mt. Angeles to the northwest. And of course the views to Mt. Olympus 12 km to the southwest were magnificent. The summit cairn was populated by flying ants that were kept hunkered down by the light but cold breeze off the glaciers below. Mt. Carrie (2132 m) was named by surveyor Theodore Rixon for his new wife in 1899. It was one of the last major peaks in the Olympic Mountains to be named.

On the way down we watched a group of goats that had wandered close to our route. There were marmots to be seen as well. We arrived back at camp at 5 p.m. to find we had a camp mascot waiting to greet us. A juvenile Olympic

snowshoe hare was bopping around, intent on licking salt off the handle of Roxanne's hiking pole. About an hour later the solitude was broken by voices coming from below in the direction of the track leading to the Cat Walk. It was a group of four looking for a place to camp. One was from Boston, another from the Portland area and two from the New York area. I dubbed them the Boston Men. They did not seem to be too well versed on the availability of water or campsites in the area. They had left Hoh Lake some 12 km to the west along the High Divide Trail at 10 a.m. that day. We told them about Boston Charlie's camp and showed them some photos we had taken of the site so they would understand the conditions there should they elect to go on. They headed off after offering us a (precious) liter of water, which we turned down. We had just enough for our proposed day hike to the Stephen Peak area the next day, where we were sure to find water.

At 6:30 the next morning, while we were heating up water for breakfast, yet another nanny goat and her kid made their way right through camp from Cat Peak direction. We remained quiet, took lots of photos, and figured that if we left them alone, they would leave us alone. At 7:45 we were heading down the goat trail back across the Cat Walk. Part way across, we met two older gentlemen coming from the opposite direction. They were on the final leg of a traverse of the Bailey Range, having come in from the upper Elwha River via Dodwell-Rixon Pass some 20 trail km to the south. They were both from the Olympia area, sported fedora hats, and were somewhat grizzled looking. We dubbed them the Indiana Jones men. We exchanged intel on the availability of water in our respective directions of travel. They indicated that they had been following a trail most of the way from Cream Lake. They also showed us the location of Swimming Bear Lake to the west of our Cat Basin Camp. This was no doubt the source of Cat Creek. Funny they did not mention the great abundance of small creeks flowing down the side hill below Mt. Ruth, farther along our intended route.

At Boston Charlie's on the other end of the Cat Walk, we met the Boston Men in the final stages of packing camp. They had made out OK. Their plan was to head up Mt. Carrie with backpacks, getting water from the glacier on the other side. They were eager to use their crampons. We wished each other well on our respective adventures. The trail climbs about 100 m above Boston Charlie's before contouring along the side of Mt. Carrie. We were surprised to find that there was indeed a very reasonable trail there. I later read that the Civilian Conservation Corps had pushed a trail from their base in Cat Basin to within 2 miles of Cream Lake (just past where we were headed) before funding was cut off with the onset of WW II. It was the "improved to parks standard" section of trail that had abruptly ended at a cliff just short of the Cat Walk.

After about 0.5 km the trail dropped steeply down about 150 m into the gully draining the cirque on the south side of Mt. Carrie. The trail, now on steep side-hill, slowly regained elevation. About 600 m along we got quite excited, as we

Looking east to Crisler Lake with Stephen Peak just visible on right (Photo: Dave Suttill)

could hear running water. We promptly filled our water bottles from a little trickle that crossed the trail. Five minutes later we crossed an even more reasonable-sized creek. Our water worries were over. After another 0.5 km the ground leveled out somewhat into a beautiful sloping valley with a number of little humps and flat areas and creeks everywhere. It was as if the glacier on the other side of Mt. Ruth above was draining underground to our side of the mountain. This is the area where naturalist photographer Herb Crisler established a camp in 1943. While filming a large herd of elk here, he observed a total of 11 bull elk. He named it 11 Bull Basin. Much of his film footage was used in the 1952 Disney documentary "Olympic Elk". Had we only known about this spot earlier?

We continued our side-hill traverse on a rudimentary but easy-to-follow trail, with a careful eye on the GPS. We wanted to get at least as far as a lake that the map showed on the other side of the ridge. At the appropriate location we left the trail and headed straight up to the ridge between Mt. Ruth and Stephen Pk. There below us on the other side was a scenic hanging valley with a circular blue-green lake 250 m in diameter. We called it Stephen Lake. We couldn't have picked a nicer turn-around spot. A rocky 200 m descent over 600 m distance took us to the shore of the lake. We spent a leisurely hour exploring and taking in the view. There were dippers and sand piper-like birds along its shore. The main flower bloom was over but various forms of Mimulus and Epilobium were still out. There were interesting rock formations scattered about. I later found out that this lake is (unofficially) called Crisler Lake, after another of Crisler's camps.

On the hike back to camp we came across the Boston Men coming down the steep scrambly part of the trail below Mt. Carrie. They had carried their packs up over Mt. Carrie, decided the glacier was too dangerous to travel on and opted to return to the trail. We told them their water worries would soon be over. That night we watched the fog roll up the valleys. We were lucky we never had any smoke problem from the Queets fire 20 km to the south.

The next morning we left camp at a leisurely 8:30 a.m. for our hike out. We had decided we would return via the High Divide Trail and see the rest of the Seven Lakes Basin. At the Heart Lake turn we picked up a hiking companion for the remainder of the hike out. At first we thought he might be a park ranger as he was wearing a brimmed hat, light-coloured shirt, dark pants and small day pack. It turned out to be a fellow from Dallas, Texas making a day hike of the Seven Lakes Basin. He was on a 2-month holiday to Alaska and back, after selling his bread delivery business. He was starved for conversation and talked about everything from Texas gun laws (earning him the name Ammo Man), helping victims of Hurricane Katrina, and his craving for wild buffalo wings. We almost missed the short side trail to Bogachiel Peak (1668 m), the highest point along the High Divide. A fire lookout was constructed there in 1934, but all that was left now was a flat bare spot. From here it was a steady down-grade along the winding trail past Deer Lake, then following Canyon Creek to the Sol Duc River. Another 1.5 km and we were back at the car. As it was only 4:30 we had ample time to stop for a swim in Lake Crescent before catching the last ferry to Victoria.

Participants: Roxanne Stedman, Dave Suttill

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DISTANT PLACES

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A Short Walk in the Eastern Ruahines, New Zealand: Waipawa Saddle and Te Atuaoparapara

Pam Olson
16 – 18 February

My first trip to New Zealand was during the antipodean summer of 1982–1983. It was the second to last country to explore in a year of solo travel in Asia and the Pacific. By that time in my travels, I was running low on money and to conserve funds, I bought a bicycle and some panniers; I rode around both main islands for three months. Over the past thirty or so years, DF and I have bicycle toured in New Zealand several times, riding mountain bikes and hybrids on rough back roads as well as on pavement. A few years ago we decided to go there without bicycles to do some tramping on the South Island. That proved to be an interesting adventure. Tramping is what the Kiwis call hiking or backpacking. This year we decided to go to the North Island; we spent about six weeks from mid-January to the end of February 2015 tramping on the North Island of New Zealand.

New Zealand consists of long islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean and as such catches all the strange weather systems that pass, making weather prediction difficult for the meteorologists. The several weeks of warm, dry days in the summer that we are accustomed to in BC just does not happen in NZ. A high pressure ridge lasting about four days is about the best one can expect. A typical summer weather forecast is “mainly fine, with a chance of showers”. Having been walking up and down mountains for about 40 years, we prefer to be out in good weather and we like to take our time. Because New Zealand weather can change so quickly, we looked for routes that would take two to four days and managed to do quite a number of short trips over the six weeks. We worked our way around the North Island, checking out various mountain ranges and national parks.

In preparation for the trip, we had examined several online resources, including “Wilderness: New Zealand’s Magazine of the Outdoors” (www.wildernessmag.co.nz/) which has a trip report section. We found descriptions of many short routes in national parks, national forests and other wild areas. New Zealand Tramper forum (tramper.nz) was also quite useful.

The highest peaks on the North Island are the volcanic cones, notably Mt. Ruapehu (2,797 m), Mt. Taranaki/Mt. Egmont (2,518 m), Mt. Ngauruhoe (2,287 m), and Mt. Tongariro (1,978 m). Other ranges include the Tararua, Ruahine, Kaweka, Kaimanawa, and Raukumara ranges which form a ridge running parallel with the east coast between East Cape in the north and Wellington in the south. These ranges are significantly lower than the volcanic mountains, the main summits being between 1,500 m and 1,730 m high.

By mid-February, we were in the Hawkes Bay area of the east coast, looking at the Ruahine Range. The Ruahine Range is the northernmost mountain range of the Wellington Region. Ruahine Forest Park encompasses 94,000 hectares in the Hawkes Bay area. The Park was gazetted in 1976, and declared a recreation, conservation and watershed protection area.

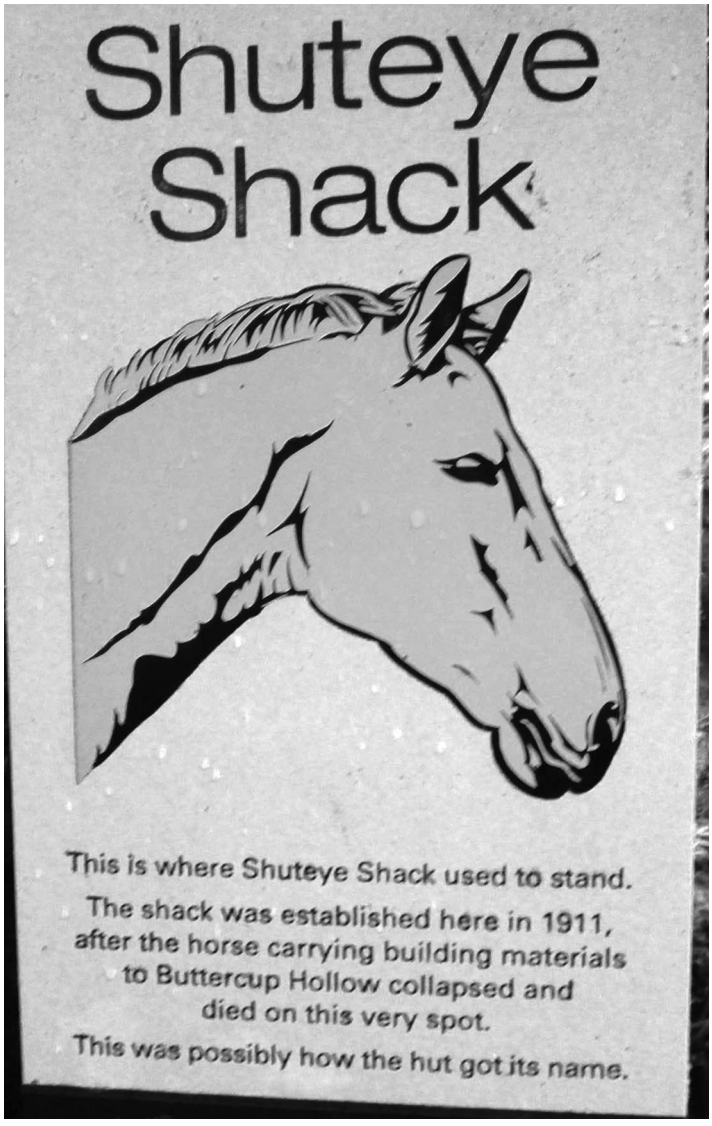
The basement rocks beneath the Wellington Region belong to Torlesse Composite Terrane and are composed largely of hardened sandstone and mudstone, known as greywacke, and contain chert and pillow lavas as well. The Ruahines are characterized by steep, crumbling peaks, exposed ridges with sheer drops, and mountain passes with streams.

Our intention was to do the Waipawa Saddle Circuit but the weather was not cooperating. We had spent a couple of days loafing around Dannevirke, waiting for the rain to stop. Finally, on 16 February, the weather forecast looked good for the next few days. After a quick stop at the grocery store to get a few last-minute food items, we drove along State Highway 2 (SH2), then turned north on to State Highway 50 (SH50). Just past the turnoff to the village of Ongaonga, we came to Wakarara Road and turned west on it, passing through agricultural land. The next turn was on to North Block Road and after driving through more farmland, some

of it on private property where we had to open and close gates, we reached the end of the road, where there was a parking area, information board and directional signs to the tracks and huts.

According to the Department of Conservation (DoC) brochure, the 12-bunk Triple X Hut, also called the Triplex Hut, is only a short distance from the car park and is used mainly as a base camp for large groups. The brochure also stated that the track to the Sunrise Hut was very popular with family and school groups. There were no other cars in the car park when we arrived, which we took as a sign that we were not likely to encounter one of those school groups.

We started up the track around 12:15. The track was well graded and zigzagged up through changing forest types. On the lower part of the track, we were walking through southern beech (*Nothofagus spp.*) and as we got higher, we encountered conifers, rimu (*Dacrydium cupressinum*) and kahikatea (*Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*). Around the 1300-metre level, the forest gave way to low growing shrubs, tussock grass and wild flowers. A few informational signs were posted along the track. These signs were sponsored by Norsewear New Zealand, a well-known outdoor clothing and gear supplier with headquarters at Norsewood near the Ruahines. Some described the track's historical uses, logging and mining, while others gave suggestions concerning tramping gear and clothing.



Informational sign

Wild flowers, possibly eyebright, Euphrasia revoluta and alpine senecio, Brachyglottis bellidioides

The Sunrise Hut is located just above the tree line in a sheltered basin known as Buttercup Hollow. It took us about 2 hours and 30 minutes to reach the Sunrise Hut, by which time clouds had developed, reducing visibility. We knew the track continued on but since we could not see anything except clouds and did not know the terrain or the availability of a camping spot with water at Armstrong Saddle, we decided to camp by the hut. Having checked the hut's log book, it appeared that the hut was well visited on weekends. Behind the hut, we found an animal trap with a dead stoat, waiting for the Park Ranger to come and dispose of it. Stoats, a mustelid, were introduced to NZ from Britain in the 1880s to control the population of rabbits and hares which were introduced as food and game animals in the 1870s. Stoats are a serious predator of native birds, many of which are flightless or ground-nesting.

We spent a quiet evening and woke around sunrise to blue skies above us and a mass of low cloud over Hawkes Bay in the distance. As we were making coffee, we heard voices and soon a school group consisting of two teachers and 16 teenage students appeared. They had driven from Wanganui the day before, overnighted at the Triplex Hut and started out in darkness in order to watch the sun rise at the Sunrise Hut. While one of the teachers took a group to the Armstrong Saddle and back, the others pulled stoves and food out of their packs and proceeded to make breakfast. By 07:45 the school group was on its way back down the track and we packed up and got on our way.

Past the hut, the track wound up the ridge to Armstrong Saddle, named after Hamish Armstrong, an experienced pilot who, in July 1935, was blown off course in bad weather, crash-landed his Gypsy Moth there and was never seen again. The Triple X Hut's name derives from a shirt labelled 'XXX' found near the wreckage by searchers. From

Te Atuaoparapara summit trig

Armstrong Saddle, we followed the well-defined track to Maropea Saddle and the turnoff to the Top Maropea Hut. We were looking for the track to Te Atuaoparapara and the Waikamaka Hut, which also branched off at the Saddle. Since this was not a DoC-maintained track, a bit of route finding through the dense leatherwoods, probably *Brachyglottis eleagnifolia* and *Olearia colensoi*, was necessary. The route was marked by the occasional piece of flagging tape and was fairly well travelled. Once past the bushy section, we followed an undulating tussock grass ridge and eventually came to the summit of Te Atuaoparapara, at 1687 m.

On the other side of the summit, the ridge changed, narrowing dramatically to a knife edge and then giving way to a steep scree slope. By 14:15 we were down the scree and looking at some lovely tarns. That would have been a fine camping place but it was a bit early in the day to stop. Our plan was to camp at the Waipawa Saddle. Not knowing if there would be water at the Saddle, we topped up our 1.5 litre water bottles and each of us filled a 3-litre collapsible container about 2/3 full. A little extra weight in the pack, but we were walking mostly downhill by this time. There was another small bump of 1625 m to cross and then it was all downhill to the Saddle. Just as we started to descend toward the Saddle, clouds rolled in, obscuring everything. However, just before the clouds rolled in, we had glimpsed the Saddle and taken a compass bearing. Then we noticed that there were cairns marking the route and we continued down through tussock, scree and finally a flower-filled steep meadow to the Waipawa Saddle, arriving there around 16:00. We found a fairly sheltered spot for the tent and set up camp. As it turned out, there was scant water at the Saddle so it was a good thing we had picked up extra at the upper tarns.

A short distance below the Saddle, to the west, in a beech forest, is the eight-bunk Waikamaka Hut owned by the Heretaunga Tramping Club of Hastings. No doubt local trampers use it as a base for exploring the surrounding peaks and ridges. We could see that the area offers a number of interesting-looking ridge walks.

Typical of New Zealand weather, by morning the wind had changed direction and it was a cool start to the day. But the sky was blue and, out of the wind, the sun was warm. While the descent to the Waipawa River was quite steep and bushy, the distance to the river bed was not far. Once at the river bed it was a matter of rock hopping, crossing and re-crossing the river to keep out of the water. The river was not deep, but was fairly wide and braided in places.

It was not necessary to go to the Waipawa Forks Hut but we made a slight detour to check it out. We reached the hut around 13:30 and had a short rest. From there we could continue to follow the river downstream or return to the Sunset Track to get back to the car park. We chose the latter route. Across the river and a bit upstream from the Hut turnoff, we found the Waipawa Forks Track that connected to the Sunset Track. By 15:00 we were back on the Sunset Track and heading down to the car park.

Just past the junction of the two tracks, we met a school group, this one consisting of a number of elementary school age students, a few teachers and parents. They shared their gummy dinosaurs with us as a snack. As we continued down the track, a young boy from the school group came running past us trying to catch up with another party in his school group. He did catch up to them and then turned back to retrace his steps. When he reached us, we asked him what was going on and he replied that one of the teachers had fallen and hurt himself, a sprained ankle. Soon, the rescue party, two men with daypacks, came into view so we knew everything was under control. We arrived at the car park around 15:30, dumped our packs into the boot and drove to Waipawa, a friendly little town on the Waipawa River, reputed to be the first English settlement in the Hawkes Bay area. There we found inexpensive accommodation in a cabin at the caravan park, a pub with talkative locals and cold beer, and a fish and chip shop.

Participants: Pam Olson, ACC member since the mid-1970s and DF (who wishes to remain anonymous)

Looking west from Waipawa Saddle

Journey to Ladakh

Albert Hestler
June 9 – July 2

In 1963, after a year spent working in Australia, I had replenished my funds sufficiently to continue on my round-the-world trip westwards, travelling overland from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to Europe. A side trip to Northern India turned out to be the opening act of a journey that I didn't complete until 52 years later, in 2015.

An important part of my travel plans in 1963 included the Himalayas – as much for my love of climbing in the mountains as my interest in exploring fabled foreign lands. Tibet still had the allure of being the mythical Shangri-La of yore, but remained as inaccessible as it had always been. The ancient kingdoms of Bhutan, Sikkim and Ladakh were closed to foreign tourists at that time – but not Nepal. Voila! As I didn't want to miss this opportunity I hustled to secure an overnight ride on the back of a truck from India to Kathmandu. To my disappointment, the high mountain regions were still out of reach as I wasn't an accredited member of a properly licensed climbing expedition. I had to be content with exploring the valley of Kathmandu by bicycle, while continuing to look for trekking opportunities elsewhere.

Lo and behold – I discovered there was a route from Simla to the remote Valley of Kulu in Northern India that could be done on foot or on horseback. With a rather primitive map in hand, I trekked about 70 km in four days from the Sutlej River over the 10,280 ft Jalori Pass to the Beas River. Unlike most self-respecting sahibs, I carried my own ex-US Army rucksack containing six month's worth of gear and clothes; the US insignia cleverly covered with a sticker that read "Quetico Voyageur" – a memento of a great canoe trip in Quetico Provincial Park in Ontario! (As you will no doubt recall, the Maple Leaf was not adopted as our national flag until 1964.) I then continued by jeep and by bus as far as Manali at the foot of the Rohtang Pass – and that's where the road literally stopped – as did my trek.

I had hoped to climb to the top of the Rohtang Pass (13,400 ft) and possibly continue into the legendary Valley of Lahoul … or at least get a glance down to the "River of the Moon", the Chandra. However, I was persuaded that this was not a wise move as I was alone and the Pass was still covered in deep snow in early April. Instead, I climbed to about 11,000 ft in the surrounding Bara Bhanjal Range with the 19,000 ft twin Gyephang peaks dominating the view. On the way down, I came across a picturesque mountain village with houses that blended architecturally with any I had known in the Alps. There I bid adieu to the valley of Kulu and travelled on by bus to Kashmir. The roads beyond the valley of Srinagar were still closed due to seasonal conditions.

Penelope Chetwode, daughter of a former British Commander-in-Chief (Baron of Chetwode) did practically the same trip as mine, by mule, in 1964. Later she wrote a book published in the 1970s about her journey entitled: "Kulu: The End of the Habitable World". As she grew up and spent most of her life in India, she gives an excellent, first-hand account of this part of the world.

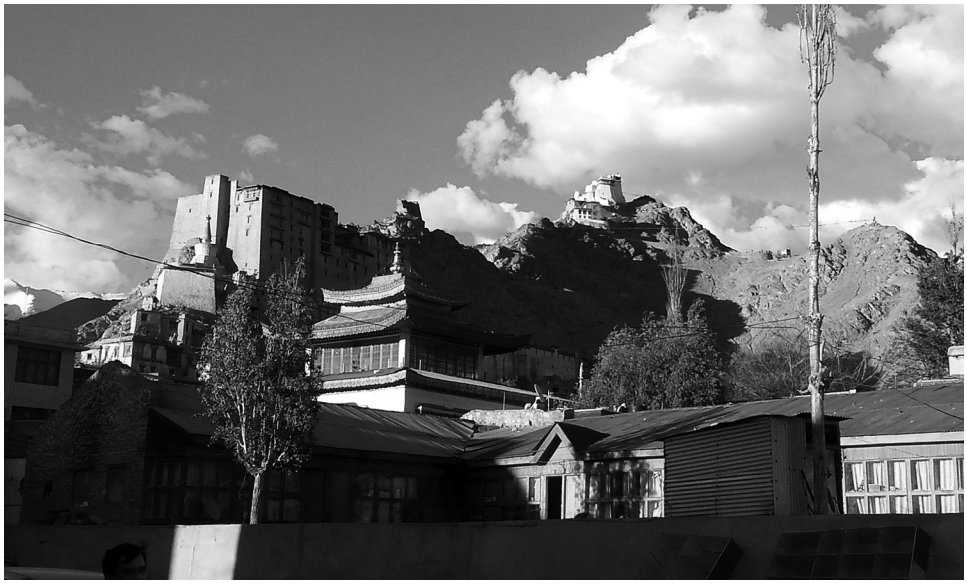
So the years went by. Off and on I read and heard about Ladakh, notably about the beauty of a new road, the Manali-Leh Highway, which the military had built in order to provide access to disputed border areas. Due to political conflicts with Pakistan, the ancient trade route from Srinagar to Leh (the capitals of the former kingdoms of Kashmir and Ladakh) had become unreliable.

Earlier this year an old friend of mine, Don Morton, mentioned to me that he had signed up with a travel company to visit Kashmir and Ladakh, and was planning to spend additional time climbing in the high mountains. His news re-awakened my own interest in the area and, upon some research, I discovered a three-week trip organized by ElderTreks under the name: "Mountains & Monasteries in Northern India". The company schedule called for taking the train from Delhi to Amritsar (Golden Temple of the Sikhs); then by car all the way overland to Dalhousie (summer retreat of British colonial administration); on to Chamba (stay at an Indian homestead); then to Dharamsala (headquarters of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government in Exile); and on to Manali (hey, that sounded familiar!) and finally Leh (now the commercial centre and only airport of Ladakh). This was an unexpected, but exciting opportunity to resume a journey I had started 52 years ago. Of course, I signed up at once!

And here we finally were … in Manali and at the base of the Rohtang Pass (3978 m). By "we" I mean our group of ten geriatric globetrotters, ranging in age from 55 up to 82, all bringing with them a fascinating array of personal interests and life experiences. I shared a room with a person originally from New Jersey who, to the best of my recollection, was a member of the Royal Geographic Society of London. His life's hobby had been to physically retrace the many expeditions that were launched in the past to discover the source of the Nile. He fully understood my passion to finally make it to the top of this particular mountain pass.

Rohtang literally means "pile of corpses". By Himalayan standards, this pass is not particularly difficult to cross on foot, but it does have a reputation for being dangerous due to icy winds and sudden blizzards that may catch travellers, with deadly results. Traffic jams are common as there are many military vehicles and trucks, as well as many tourist vehicles, attempting to navigate tight roads and rough terrain. We set out early in the morning to avoid the worst of the traffic, yet still had to wait at one point while the army cleared an avalanche. The weather had also changed overnight and it was now raining.

I would have loved to see the crest of this pass in its pristine state before the highway was built. Now the pass has become a tourist destination as it is one of the few places where Indians can escape the stifling heat of the Ganges plain and literally roll in snow, touch it and play in it. Appropriate clothing and gear for various winter sports can easily be rented, for actual use and photo-ops. Needless to say, we didn't linger.



Leh, Ladakh

The rain mercifully stopped as we headed down the other side. This improved the views, though driving became even more challenging as the road deteriorated under the onslaught of landslides and road washouts. At last we reached the Chandra River, a very beautiful valley, indeed. We stopped quickly for lunch in a small village, filled up with gas at the last station before Leh (380 km away), and finally made it to our budget hotel in Jispa. We had covered 135 km in eleven hours.

This pretty much set the pattern for the next two days. We soon left permanent human habitation behind and entered into a new and dramatically different landscape, all at much higher altitude. The road conditions were poor at the best of times, often just single-lane, with steep drop-offs and no barriers. Though there was now less traffic on the road, the experience was tarnished by the well-known propensity of Indian drivers to play "chicken" - a nerve-wracking experience when executed around blind corners. As was pointed out repeatedly by white-knuckled travellers, the key to survival was a "good car, good driver and good luck". I must admit, that the drivers of our three SUV's were exceptionally good.

The road crossed several high passes, notably the Baralach La (4890 m), Nakeela Pass (4950 m), Lachulung La (5100 m), and Taglung La, at 5359 m (17,582 ft) the second highest pass in India. When describing the approach, I simply quote from the guide book which reads: "The ascent of Baralach La now begins: the rough, dusty road takes tortuous turns as it labours up the steep arid brown slope, crested by snow-capped tops. Eventually, a lake appears, a shimmering blue glacial tarn called Suraj Tal (Sun Lake). The road, narrow here, runs by the lakeshore to the top of the pass." From there we went down to the Sarchu Plains and the Golden Drop tent-camp. At 4300 m (14,150 ft) it was the highest elevation at which we slept. We were all doing fine because we had acclimatized slowly and were taking the recommended dosage of Diamox pills. But it was cold … and it started to snow!

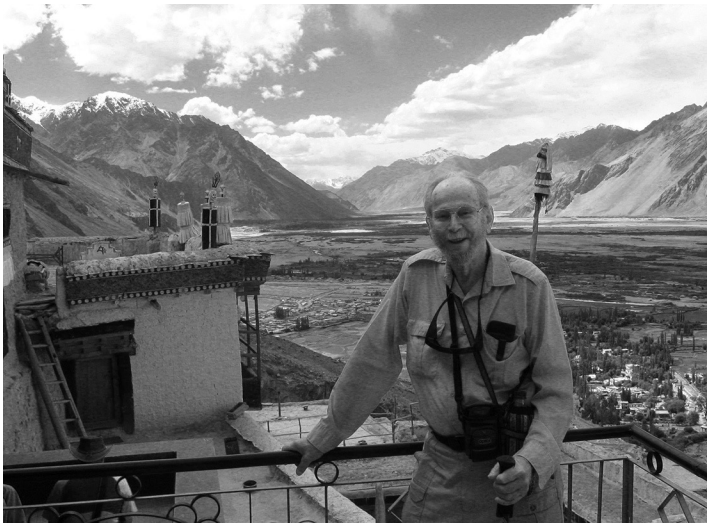
The next day we travelled through a truly spectacular landscape. To illustrate briefly: There was the meandering river at Sarchu with hoodoo-like pinnacles lining the embankment; a series of 21 hairpin bends leading to the top of Nakeela Pass; a steep canyon down the Lachulung River with its picturesque natural sculptures like an arched gateway and huge rock cones. Then the magical Morey Plains which stretched some 50 km; the high peaks of the Zanskar Mountains, covered in clouds; Taglung La pass, with the customary prayer flags which are believed to send blessings into the world and promote peace, compassion, strength and wisdom. Lastly the descent amidst a maze of hills in various shades of brown to the welcoming green fields of the Upper Indus valley … and finally Leh itself.

Two days later, the Times of India (Sat. June 27, 2015) published an article under the headline: "Snow-blocked Manali-Leh Highway opens after 36 hours".

The news explained that "… the first showers of the monsoon season had triggered landslides and flash floods along this strategically important highway, making driving dangerous … the Baralach pass had received 45 cm of fresh snow overnight on Wednesday, causing two trucks to get stuck … and an avalanche had also blocked the highway." We had crossed the Baralach La pass on the same day, but before snow accumulation had rendered this pass "impassable". What a stroke of good fortune – especially as the whole trip had been arranged to include the special "Hemis Festival" that we were scheduled to visit on our first day after arriving in Leh.

The Upper Indus Valley at roughly 3500 m (11,500 ft) is practically a desert: a vast flat expanse hemmed in by the Zanskar Mountains to the south (Stok Kangri at 6150 m the most prominent peak) and the Ladakh Range to the north. Irrigation has turned the barren land into an oasis-like fertile garden. There are no forested mountain slopes as in the valleys of Kulu and Lahaul. Instead, they are bare and brown from valley floor to snow line. Still, it has an austere beauty of its own, affecting the senses even more in its immensity and emptiness.

Speaking of the latter, Ladakh is one and a half times



Nubra Valley, Ladakh

the size of Switzerland, yet has a population of just over 300,000. This may also explain why the old city of Leh is still relatively small and can easily be covered on foot. On our walk-about we found it had only one main street. There were many shops of all kinds, open markets on the sidewalk, and throngs of bustling shoppers. I enjoyed its friendly, tolerant atmosphere and unique character.

Ladakh is often called “Little Tibet”, primarily due to the Tibetan/Buddhist influence on culture, art and religion. When travelling in other parts of the world, the most imposing buildings usually are churches, mosques, pagodas and temples (dependent on the prevailing religion), as well as palaces and castles. In Ladakh, the most dominant structures are monasteries - and there are many! The royal palace in Leh, a most imposing structure, is the only one that stands alone; all other royal dwellings are part of fortress-like complexes that also contain Buddhist temples. This tends to make them visually indistinguishable from monasteries, especially as they too are usually located on steep hillsides or rocky outcrops. I’ll refrain from listing all the monasteries we visited, but should mention that they are indeed treasure troves of ancient art and architecture.

Alchi, for instance, boasts the most significant murals in all Ladakh. These are over 900 years old and well preserved. Thikse Monastery is built in the style of the Dalai Lama’s palace (the Potala) in Lhasa. It claims the most beautiful statue of Buddha that stretches 40 feet through three stories. Then there is Hemis with its annual mask dance festival. The dances generally dramatize the battle of good over evil, especially the miraculous deeds of Guru Rinpoche. He is reputed to have introduced Buddhism from Tibet to Bhutan and Ladakh in the 8th century.

The dancers move in slow, stately steps, wearing strange masks and colourful costumes of fantastic designs. The dances are accompanied by sonorous chants and hypnotic music created by drums, bells, cymbals, trumpets, and the vibration-inducing drone of the Tibetan longhorn. It was an experience just to be there – indeed one of the highlights of my travels.

Another high point - certainly in geographic terms - was the overnight trip to the Nubra region north of Leh, because the road goes up and over the Khardung La Pass, claimed, at 5602 m (18,380 ft), to be the “highest motorable pass in the world”. (If this claim is correct - though disputed - then I, as a mountain climber, have to admit that the highest altitude I have actually reached in my life was by car, and not by foot – and that by a mere 50 m. Shucks!) Nevertheless, for many riders on motorcycles or bicycles (especially Indians) this pass is a holy place and getting there a spiritual journey. The ascent is truly spectacular, as are the wide-ranging views back down into the Indus Valley and, from the top, toward the 7000 m Karakoram Mountains. The pass itself is definitely a tourist destination with people jostling to take their “summit” photos.

The road then leads into the most remarkable valley at the vast multi-braided confluence of the Nubra and Shyok rivers. And farther along, there are sand dunes where Bactrian camels can be hired for a ride in the desert. These camels were cut off from the main herds in Central Asia when the Chinese authorities closed the border in the 1950s, effectively killing this ancient trade route between India and China.

Sprawling almost vertically across a steep slope high above the village of Diskit is another monastery, the Diskit Gompa, founded in 1420. It was here that I did my most impressive climbing of the whole journey - ascending numerous well-worn staircases to reach the main temple. It was even recommended that the use of hiking poles would be very helpful here, which indeed they were.

Our return to Leh along the same route over the Khardung La was yet another travel experience because it snowed most of the way and the pass was in “white-out” condition. Time to return home.

In conclusion, I thoroughly enjoyed what we saw and experienced, although I missed the old-time trekking and im-

Khardung La Pass, Ladakh

promptu explorations of my past journeys, when I travelled solo. This time it was in the approved style of the proper sahib, travelling with baggage, porters and modern conveyances. Now that I have fulfilled my dream of visiting all the ancient kingdoms of the Himalayas mentioned earlier, I ask myself, what next?

My big dream (goal) as a mountain climber has always been to one day climb the Matterhorn – and to succeed – not to be "weathered out" as happened when I was a twenty-year old young man. Yet I know from experience that the moments at the top - of having reached the goal - are indeed fleeting and often more in the category of "been there, done that!"

I have gradually come to appreciate that it is the journey after all that matters most. While we all wish that everything would proceed as planned, it is really the unknown, the unexpected, the low points as much as the highlights, especially the many different people one meets, that turn a particular trip into a memorable adventure. It is one of the perks of growing old that these memories can be retrieved for a good story or "words of wisdom" any time, again and again.

My personal "Matterhorns" have, by necessity, shrunk to lower heights - but dreams - they are the prayer flags of the mind, carrying our hopes and wishes. Why would I give them up?

Tashi delek!

The Roof of the World

Liz Williams
November

A year after drinking Kilimanjaro beer in Moshi, I was enjoying an Everest beer in Kathmandu - a place where cosmic chaos becomes perfect order (I think). How can so many people sit in shop doorways crammed to the rafters with a million tons of yak wool blankets, brass ganesh ornaments, singing bowls, Ghurkha scimitars, beads, gold jewelry, Indian saris, sacks of pulses, potatoes, and spices, tiger balm, prayer wheels, maps, and dusty, knock-off trekking gear, apparently selling absolutely nothing all day? How does it all work? Much as I was enchanted by KTM, I left with a streaming cold and felt as if I'd smoked two packs a day for the last twenty years.

The plan was to trek the Manaslu Circuit and Tsum Valley with three Canadian and two Slovakian men, which sounded a good balance to me. We started out from Gorkha, the original imperial capital of Nepal, with a guide (required for this area) and three porters, and spent our second night at Barpak, the epicentre of the April 2015 earthquake. The damage and tent villages for the next few days were pretty daunting, and people are rebuilding their slate slab dwellings once again with no mortar. Where would it come from? Everything arrives by mule, and there is no road access, only excruciatingly narrow paths that drop 300 m to raging torrents. A handful of people die each year in the Manaslu due to standing on the wrong side of the trail when a mule train comes by.

We chose to start at Gorkha because the usual route from Arughat Bazaar was damaged, but in retrospect it made little difference. For the first few days of trekking - to Laprak, and over Singla pass down to Khorlabesi on the Budhi Gandaki River - I was overwhelmed by the welcoming villagers, and the giggling urchins who followed us. I began to understand what others mean when they speak so warmly of the Nepali people. And nothing could have prepared me for the splendour of the Himalaya: the Ganesh Himal to our east and the Boudha Himal to the west simply blew me away.

From Khorlabesi we headed north, up the east side of the river, with terraced rice paddies on the steep-sided slopes and wild cannabis growing along the trail. Much of the Hi-

The twig bridge

The Wheel of Life

malayan vegetation seemed quite familiar, with hollyhocks, geraniums, chrysanthemums, and pearly everlasting. Then we came to where the earthquake had taken off the side of the mountain. The locals had gathered what twigs they could find to build a “bridge” across the gorge to divert us to the other side. There are a few times in one’s life when you know there’s no going back. Childbirth is one of them, and this was another (the photo doesn’t say half of it).

I swear by the stress-reducing benefits of C_2H_5OH. After the ‘Twig Bridge’ and a day of relentless exposure, mercifully a large bottle of Gorkha beer was available at our next stop, Jagat, where I sat in the late afternoon sun, coming down from a challenging day.

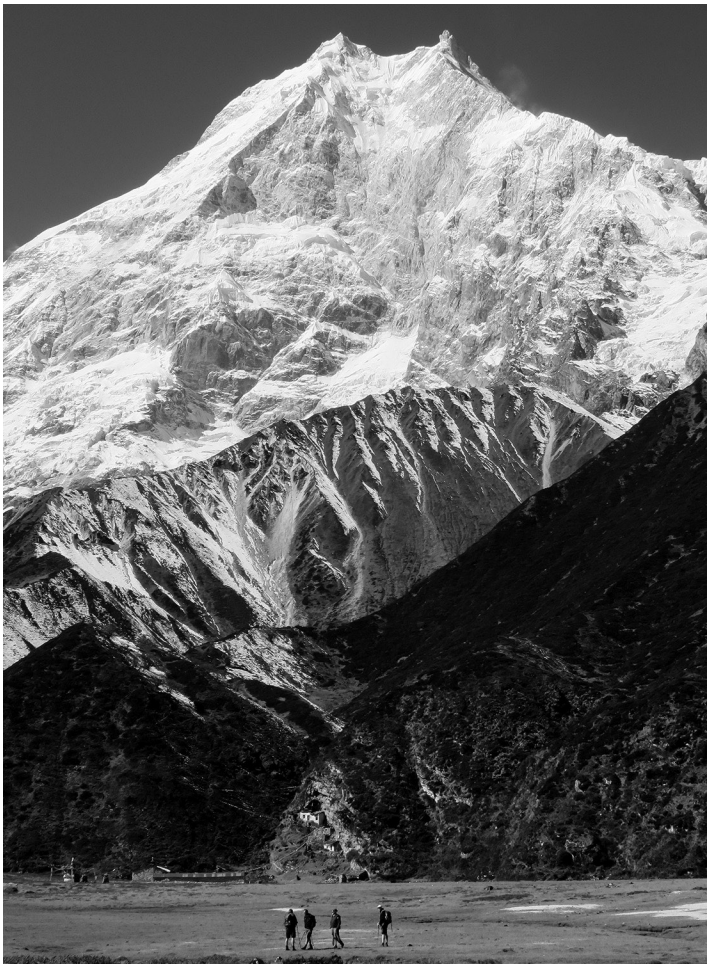
By now it was apparent that one of our team was in trouble, but it was another three days of long haul up precipitous trails before we could reach a sat phone and suitable site for his heli-evacuation. The earthquake had left some nightmarish DFU zones (thanks Roxy, for the acronym!) that even had the porters (aka young mountain goats) hugging and laughing afterwards with relief. Our team-mate lost all his toenails and nearly all his toes, but has survived to tell his tale. (By the blessing of the Lord Buddha I survived the route unscathed but for the loss of a little toenail polish, but maybe permanent damage to my adrenal glands).

At first I thought, how can I ever keep this up for 21 days? But by now I was losing count. On the fifth day we entered the Tsum Valley, first opened to travellers in 2008. The Tsum Valley was uninhabited until the 1950s when Tibetans moved south to escape the Chinese Cultural Revolution. There’s no road access from either Nepal or Tibet, but we met several yak trains heading up and over to Kyirong in Tibet for supplies. We trekked for seven days in the Tsum, up to 4,000 m, staying in freezing sheds and passing on the left-hand side of many chortens, mani walls and prayer wheels. The route between Lokpa, Chumling, Chhokang Paro, Nile, and Mu Gompa was steep, loose and tortuously exposed for the first few days, becoming a vast, wind-driven plain bordered by sheer-sided cliffs closer to Tibet. This stark landscape with primitive villages beneath the peaks of the Himalaya is – simply - sublime. Then, in the middle of nowhere is the Rachen Gompa, a monastery for women, with recently painted Buddhist thankas adorning its entrance: STUNNING! EXQUISITE! BREATHTAKING!

By now, the word ‘basic’ had taken on new meaning. On arriving completely wiped after a long day’s climb (we were up at 6 a.m., packed and marching before 8 a.m. each day), the sight of a dangling light bulb or a dripping cold tap brought joy to the heart, before reality set in as both would prove dysfunctional, the light being solar-powered and the water supply frozen or leaking somewhere uphill.

Back on the Manaslu circuit, we passed through Bihi Phedi and Namrung, where we glimpsed the glorious Gorkha Himal, with Rani Peak, and then Lho, with our first sight of the magnificent Manaslu, the 8th highest mountain in the world. Then on to Samogoan, where we were to spend a ‘rest’ day as part of our acclimatization. That day we climbed up to view the Punggen Glacier and monastery - truly an amazing sight with Manaslu Peak as the backdrop. I thought I was losing it that day due to altitude sickness but fortunately only needed to lose my stomach contents (sick of Tibetan fried bread, rice, potatoes, chapatti, barely a fruit or veg in sight for three weeks).

Past Samogoan and Samdo, we eventually arrived at Dharamsala (Pilgrim’s Rest - ha!) ready for the attempt at Larkya Pass. At Dharamsala there are two long, filthy sheds, one for eating more stodge, the other a cobbled floor, tin-roof cowshed for sleeping. At most of our abodes the most trying time would be from 4 p.m. until dinner time, when the sun had gone behind the mountain and raging winds would howl. We would try and stuff ourselves into the dark smoky kitchens with their chimney-less wood stoves, along with our wonderful ‘boys’ to keep warm. Quite a lot of raksi was consumed - a weak Nepali ‘wine’, distilled from millet in three large copper pots over a wood fire. Raksi is drunk slightly warm from the kettle and resembles the first pass of washing-up water from the tub at the ACC summer camps. At Dharamsala there was no cozy kitchen (only propane tanks), no raksi, and I ate supper in six layers of



Manaslu Peak

clothing including two down jackets.

For the Pass, we got up at 3:30 a.m. to pack, eat (ugh) and get moving before 5 a.m. in order to reach the Pass before the wind got up. It was minus 10 C and the wind was already like flying razor blades. It was hard to imagine how it could have got worse. We set off in pitch black, losing our guide who'd raced ahead, and climbed through snow an additional 800 m to Larkya Pass at 5,200 m. Needless to say, once the sun crept over the mountains at 7 a.m., and the Himal was shining and glistening 360 degrees around us, it was an overwhelming experience.

At the Pass we were confronted with an enormous Wall of White before us, including Annapurna II. Ye Gods! But what goes up must come down. We'd been warned the descent would be icy and steep. Three hours over almost vertical rock and ice, albeit with porters taking turns to help me, was the most prolonged stress of the trek. There was no margin of error and for an acrophobic it took everything I've got. It was a 10-hour day, and at altitude, no cake walk.

It took a further two days of delightful descent back into the forest and jungle zones. One day we came across trees that harboured yellow berries all along their branches. The Slovakians assured me they were OK to eat and I filled myself with this sour, juicy, fresh, vitamin C-laden fruit - the first in three weeks. I later found that this was 'sea-buck-

Liz and companions at Larkya Pass

thorn'.

From Besi Sahar I got a bus back to the lakeside town of Pokhara, and indulged in a very long hot bath. The next afternoon I passed a Tibetan music shop. The Buddhist chants brought tears to my eyes thinking of the high Tsum Valley, and the yaks with their sonorous brass bells forged in those smoky fires. I turned on my heels and bought a couple of CDs to play when I review the 1000-plus pictures I took on the trek.

Participant: Liz Williams

Trekking to the Akha Hill Tribes of Laos

Graham Maddocks
November 8, 2014 – 6th January 6, 2015

Laos

My article is about the Akha hill tribe people of Northern Laos, but I want to give some context and historical background to my interest in this trip. Everyone knows the story of the Second Indochina War and the involvement of the United States in Vietnam. The story of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia is also well known, but the story of the "Secret War" in Laos and the Pathet Lao is still, well almost, secret. A base for trekking to the Akha hill tribe villages is Phongsoly, the provincial capital of Phongsoly Province, Laos.

The Story of the Historical Context

Phongsoly Province is in the far north of Laos and was a stronghold of the communist Pathet Lao party (Land of the Lao), who were aligned with Ho Chi Minh's communist party before WW2. Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh (Vietnamese Nationalist) party had fought against the Japanese and French occupation of French Indochina. The Vichy French govern-

ment had collaborated with the Japanese and continued to administrate Indochina under Japanese rule. After the war ended, the anti-Japanese/French resistance regrouped in this area and following the fall of French Indochina at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam in 1954, the region has been in the control of the communist Pathet Lao since that time.

My interest was in the secret war in Laos during the Second Indochina War. The Viet Cong (Vietnamese Communist Party) under Ho Chi Minh violated the Geneva agreement of 1954, which had divided Vietnam at the 17th parallel into a communist North and a republican South; this agreement preserved the neutrality of Laos. The act of violation was building the Ho Chi Minh trail through Laos and Cambodia to deliver Chinese and Russian weapons and munitions to the Viet Cong tunnel complexes in South Vietnam. The original supply lines through Vietnam had been heavily bombed by the US. The US backed the Laotian Royalist government and pulverized the trail with carpet bombing. Both sides denied their involvement, and this became the "Secret War" in Laos from 1964-1973. I remember Richard Nixon, when being questioned on the subject, saying that the US did not have any combat troops in Laos. This was true, but a bit of a stretch, as the US dropped over 2 million tons of bombs on Laos, in over 580,000 sorties. The cost was $2 million a day, every day, for 9 years. These are official US figures. I make no judgement of this in my article, the brutality of the communists, who executed 20% of the population of Cambodia, far exceeded that of the jihadists rampaging through the Middle East today. In Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, one rarely sees people of my generation. They were either executed or bombed, or they fled as refugees. Ideals are peaceful, history is violent.

The Story of the Extent of the Bombing

I thought that I knew the story of the Second Indochina War, but nothing prepares you for the amount of munitions dropped on Laos during the secret war. On 23rd November, I made a visit to one of the Pathet Lao caves in Viang Xai, close to the Ho Chi Minh trail. This date is national remembrance day in Laos, as 11th November is to us. On this day in 1968, a US spotter plane flying for a SE Asia air freight company, Air America, saw ducks and chickens outside the cave and called in an airstrike. These pilots were CIA volunteers and the air freight company was owned and operated by the CIA. The pilots, who had a 50% casualty rate, flew unarmed light aircraft over Pathet Lao territory looking for targets. (An excellent account of the involvement of the CIA pilots is "The Ravens" by Christopher Robbins.) A US aircraft fired a rocket into the mouth of the cave, killing 378 people – rice farmers who may or may not have been communists. The day is attended by large crowds and Buddhist monks preside over offerings and ceremonies.

The Pathet Lao cadre lived in these caves for 9 years and were bombed on a daily basis by the US. They were afraid poison gas would be dropped on them and safe rooms were constructed with air tight metal doors. Fresh air was supplied by a hand-operated pump with a long concealed intake, these homemade pumps are still in operating condition today. A large cave, the size of a ballroom functioned as a theatre; there were plays, movies and acrobats from Vietnam and China. Weddings were held in this theatre cave, celebrated by meals of jungle greens and a handful of rice, gathered during the safety of the night. A tiny, narrow cave functioned as a bank. There was even a telephone exchange that operated on a code system. The name of the caves, Viang Xai, was the code name of the Pathet Lao leader Kaysone Phomvihane, who would answer his phone to this codename.

Many of the bombs dropped on Laos did not explode and even today, the Laotians find them and defuse them. Bombs are everywhere, some as small as a tennis ball (cluster bombs) and some 5000 pounds, hauled out by elephants. The non-ferrous aluminum fuses are melted down to make spoons and forks and are sold in the markets. Truly, swords into ploughshares. On my walks down the Ho Chi Minh trail I would visit with village blacksmiths, who still hand forge agricultural tools, with their wives working a wooden bellows. They often told me a similar story: that the best steel to forge was US bomb casings and shrapnel. The unfortunate part of this is that it creates a market and people look for unexploded munitions to sell. It has been 40 years since the last bomb was dropped, but Laos still averages one casualty a day from handling unexploded munitions.

In Vientiane, I visited the centre for a British NGO, Mines Advisory Group (MAG), who are training local people to demine the countryside and clear more land for agriculture. They also have a workshop that manufactures prosthetic limbs for mine victims. An aircraft loaded with bombs is reluctant to land and for safety will drop its payload first. US B52 bombers, unable to hit their targets in North Vietnam, because of bad weather or anti-aircraft fire, dumped their bombs on the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos on the way back to their bases in Thailand. One single cluster bomb casing contains 800 bomblets, designed to maim infantry, some as small as a golf ball contain as little as 80 grams of explosive and 20 pellets, not much more than a shotgun shell. MAG estimates there are still 30 million unexploded cluster bomblets waiting to be picked up by scrap metal dealers, farmers and children (40% of mine casualties are children).

The extent of the presence of bombs is hard to explain. I saw fences and garden planters made from cluster bomb casings. One family had lined their driveway with a 5000-pound bomb and a line of 2000-pound bombs. They are used as balcony supports and road markers, and many restaurants, guesthouses and tea shops have a display, some defused, some not. The explosive is reused for fishing bombs, construction or blasting tree stumps. I carefully examined and photographed much of this ordnance and the scale is still almost incomprehensible. Laos is the most heavily bombed country on the earth. The US dropped more tonnage on Laos than the total amount dropped by everybody in WW2. A total of 13 million tons of bombs were dropped on Laos, North Vietnam and Cambodia during the Second Indochina War. These are official US figures.

Communist aggression in SE Asia began in 1950, when Mao Se Tung backed the North Korean invasion of the South Korean republic. The Korean peninsula had been occupied by the Japanese Imperial army from 1910 to 1945. The peninsula was divided at the 38th parallel when advancing Russian troops met the Allied forces (Russia had declared war on Japan after the atomic bombs were dropped and was engaged in a land grab). Earlier in this trip I had visited the Canadian memorial and exhibit in the Korean War Museum in Seoul. I travelled north to the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) at Panmunjeom, where a ceasefire (not a peace) agreement was signed in 1953. Canada was a party to the agreement, after making a substantial military contribution to the UN forces fighting the communists. Of 27 countries who supplied military aid to the UN force, Canada's was the third largest, after the US and Great Britain. The South Korean military police adopt a ritual Taekwondo martial arts stance, fists clenched at their sides, feet apart, as they stare across the border at the North Korean guards staring back. I also visited the many-kilometers-long tunnels that North Korea had dug 100 meters down through solid granite, to invade the South again, but had been detected. Four of these tunnels have been found, and it is estimated that 15 exist.

When the Pathet Lao overran Vientiane in 1975, after the fall of South Vietnam and Cambodia in that same year, the Laotian King and his family (a lineage of 650 years), were sent to a re-education camp and were never heard from again. Anyone deemed to need "re-educating" – schoolteachers, administrators, civil servants and Royalist soldiers – were sent to these camps and died there of exhaustion and malnutrition. Laos, like Vietnam, retains its old Communist Party as a government, which is now rampantly capitalist and corrupt. The valleys in Phongsoly Province are all being flooded by multiple dams built by Chinese power companies with Chinese workers to produce electricity for China. The traditional lifestyles of the hill tribe people are fast disappearing. On a one-day boat journey down the Nam Ou River, a tributary of the Mekong, I passed five massive dams under construction: one was already blocking the river and the boat passengers had to take a pick-up truck shuttle around the dam to another boat. I asked the local people what they thought about the Chinese dams. They knew they would lose the use of the river for easy transportation and the fish would be gone, but they were grateful for the small jobs the Chinese projects give them: driving trucks, dredging sand and gravel from the river for construction, and watchmen. These people are at the bottom of the employment chain and no foreign aid projects reach them. International money donations stay at the government level.

The Story of the Plain of Jars

I visited the Plain of Jars, where there are several thousand large stone jars, some 3 meters high and weighing 6 tons. They are of unknown origin, but have been dated to 2,500 years ago and are thought to be burial urns of a lost Iron Age civilization. Many of the smaller ones have been carted away. There are groups of standing stones in nearby eastern Laos, also thought to be grave sites from the Iron Age. The Plain of Jars is close to the Ho Chi Minh trail and was a stronghold of the Pathet Lao forces; the area was the scene of heavy fighting between the communists and the Royal Lao Army, who were supported by US aircraft. The CIA trained and armed the Hmong hill tribes in this area as a "Secret Army," tens of thousands strong, to also fight the communists. Last year, a CBC Current Affairs program was about this Hmong army, who had to flee the Pathet Lao takeover of the country. The program was called "The Forgotten Army" and centered around the Hmong refugee community in Vancouver. This program may still be available as a CBC Podcast.

The Plain of Jars was heavily bombed and there are bomb craters all around the jar sites; many of the jars have bomb damage and bullet holes from being strafed by US aircraft. It is a miracle that any of the jars are intact. The area was also heavily mined and narrow paths have been cleared to several of the 90 jar sites by MAG. I based myself in Ponsavan at this time and it was Hmong New Year, an occasion when people wear bright new traditional clothing and arrive in town in pickups from the outlying villages to attend the annual festival. Bull-fighting was popular and a fair had been set up, the rural Hmong villagers stared goggle eyed at the Chinese bumper cars.

The Story of Phongsoly Town

In Phongsoly town the government loudspeakers belt out propaganda and patriotic music at 5:00 a.m. to get the workers up and broadcast the government's version of the news and Laotian/Chinese music in the evening. The town has a lot of Chinese influence and the cobbled streets and wooden shop houses resemble old Kunming. At 1500 meters, the mist rolled in at night as people walked their buffalos home along the cobbled streets past the old Yunnan style shop houses.

If you want to see the local wildlife, the best place is the meat section of the market, where you will see civet cats (similar to a raccoon), squirrels, monkeys, unidentified endangered species, songbirds, snakes, grubs, insects and lots of rats. Several times I saw children beside the road selling enormous moles that they had caught. I saw a dog's head in the market and was reminded that someone once said to me that dogs are more pleasant in countries where they are eaten and it is true. Victoria's dogs snarl and snap on the Dallas Road beaches with impunity, but in Laos they walk by the meat section in a subdued manner. Walking between the villages I often encountered people selling roasted rats beside the trail for snacks. At least the rats could be identified by their long tails, which is more than can be said for the meat in the restaurants, which is always of suspicious origin. You don't see many cats? Another delicacy was duck embryos in the egg, sold in the market, the top of the egg shell is peeled off, some chilli sauce added and the perfectly formed duckling, complete with feathers and beak is crunched down.

The villages around Phongsoly are Phounoy, a small group

Akha woman

indigenous to Laos. Their villages were deserted during the day as all the people were in the fields. These people practice slash-and-burn agriculture for rice and cash crops such as green tea, coffee and medicinal herbs. They build temporary shelters in the cleared hillside patches, where they often spend the night to avoid the trek back to the village. There are 49 different ethnic groups in Laos, with 86 distinct languages and dialects. Each ethnic group has its own customs and taboos.

The Story of the Akha Hill Tribes

I had travelled down the Ho Chi Minh Trail with a Khamu speaking guide (the local ethnic group) and realized what a social ice breaker it is to speak to people in their own language. In Phongsoly town I enlisted a guide who was not Akha, but had an Akha Loun wife; this dialect is similar to the Akha Nuquoy spoken along the Laos/China border region. The older people do not leave their villages and do not understand different dialects, but the next generation travel to other villages and grasp different dialects. My guide proved his worth many times, as the Akha are very traditional and animist in their beliefs. They are unaccustomed to visitors and certainly not to photographs.

The Akha originate from China and were displaced into Laos during the many civil wars in China in 18th/19th/20th centuries. The Akha women wear an elaborate high cloth-covered bamboo headdress and indigo coloured homemade clothes that are sewn with silver coins, usually French Indochina piastres, which have a high silver content and intricate silver jewelry. This silver is a woman's dowry and she wears it every day. They grow cotton and separate the fibres of the cotton balls with a bow and a wooden plucking tool (hard to describe), in the evening after dinner, for hours. Then, as they walk, they use the motion of walking to run the whorl against their leg with every stride and spin cotton thread. This is woven on a wooden foot-operated loom to create durable cotton cloth. This cloth is dyed a deep indigo colour, with a dye from a jungle plant that has been soaked for a week. I have indigo-coloured cloth that I bought many years ago in Kano, northern Nigeria, where the dye pits are 800 years old. The deep indigo colour is the same and I do not know if the plants are related. The colour is fast and never fades.

We walked for three days along steep mountain paths and stayed at the villages of different ethnic groups. I told my guide to compensate the villagers for their hospitality, with whatever was appropriate. I had my pack full of toothbrushes, toothpaste, combs, soap, shampoo sachets and some kitchen knives for gifts (as we in Victoria take a bottle of wine to a friend's house). I do not give gifts to children or hand out medical supplies, as the people do not know how to use them. Our first contact with the Akha went well: we encountered an Akha woman on the trail carrying a staggering load of banana tree stalks to be used as pig food. She carried this massive load in a basket, with a forehead tumpline passing through a wooden shoulder yoke to spread the weight. The guide spoke to her and she smiled and set her pack down to socialize (people did this before the advent of smartphones). I gave her a toothbrush and paste and she reciprocated with forest food from her shoulder bag, a lemon-flavoured tree nut, a herb related to cilantro and a root, galangal, that must be related to ginger. I showed her digital images of other people and she agreed to a photograph and was delighted to see herself. Now I had an image to show other Akha and to ease into some photographs.

In the Akha villages we always stayed with the village chief; he will have the biggest thatched hut and it is part of his duties. The chiefs are not hereditary, but are elected from the most capable men. One chief was quite young and I was surprised when he said he had been the chief for 8 years; he told me he had been elected because he had been to school. In the Akha thatched huts there are many taboos, beginning with a spirit gate to the village. The men sleep on one platform and the women on another. A taboo concerns the wife of the chief's first born son, they marry very young and as soon as the girl is pregnant (intimacy must happen in the forest as there is no privacy in the communal huts), she sleeps in a separate tiny cubicle in the family hut. She does not have sexual relations with her husband again until the child is reared and married. As strange as this may sound, I asked several times and in different ways and still got the same answer. Another taboo is twins, who are killed at birth; the parents must leave the village and live in the forest for 3 months. They will then have to sacrifice a buffa-

lo in a shamanistic ceremony to be allowed back.

The Akha women do most of the heavy manual work and leave the village before dawn and return with heavy loads of water carried in large bamboo pipe containers. The Akha site their villages on high hilltops. I do not know the reason; it is a taboo, it may be to avoid malarial mosquitoes, but it always involves a long walk to a water source. They then spend the day clearing land, hoeing and weeding, then return to the village in the evening with huge heavy loads of firewood and banana-stalk pig food, make the meal, wash up and then start plucking their bows to separate the cotton balls. The men hunt, converse, mind the children and make all the important decisions.

In one village, the chief's daughter in law (a domestic slave-like status) was seduced into a photograph with a gift of a stick of underarm deodorant; everyone had a sniff and agreed it was potent. The gift came with instructions on how to use it and not to eat it. But you never get the photographs you want, one day on the trail we encountered a young couple who had just married, she had new clothes, an elaborate bejeweled headdress and many silver piastres sewn to the front of the dress with necklaces and earrings to match. We socialized and I showed them digital images of other Akha women and the husband agreed to her being photographed in her wedding finery. I gave her a tooth-brush and paste to ease the situation, but at the critical moment her shyness overcame her and she turned away. It would have been a National Geographic front cover.

The Story of the Obese Pigs

We arrived in one village where the people were just butchering a huge buffalo. Buffalo fights are a local sport and another village will bring their champion to a fight; the fighting consists mostly of a test of strength, as the buffaloes lock horns and push and shove each other. They are massive beasts and this one had had his leg broken in the fight, this had sealed his fate. I was so relieved to see this, as I knew there would be buffalo for dinner for everyone. My dread was another meal of pork. The villages have no toilets and the pigs are obese (I trust the reader can make the connection). I discovered this connection 30 years ago, when I had previously trekked to the Akha villages, not finding the toilets and there being no privacy, I used the forest facilities in the pitch black, when an impatient obese pig ran between my legs. This is the closest that I have come to cardiac arrest so far in this life. One only uses the facilities in the daylight, when the pigs can be located, they sense the event is happening and grunt approvingly, trekking poles are used to fend off the impatient pigs until the appropriate time.

Akha village

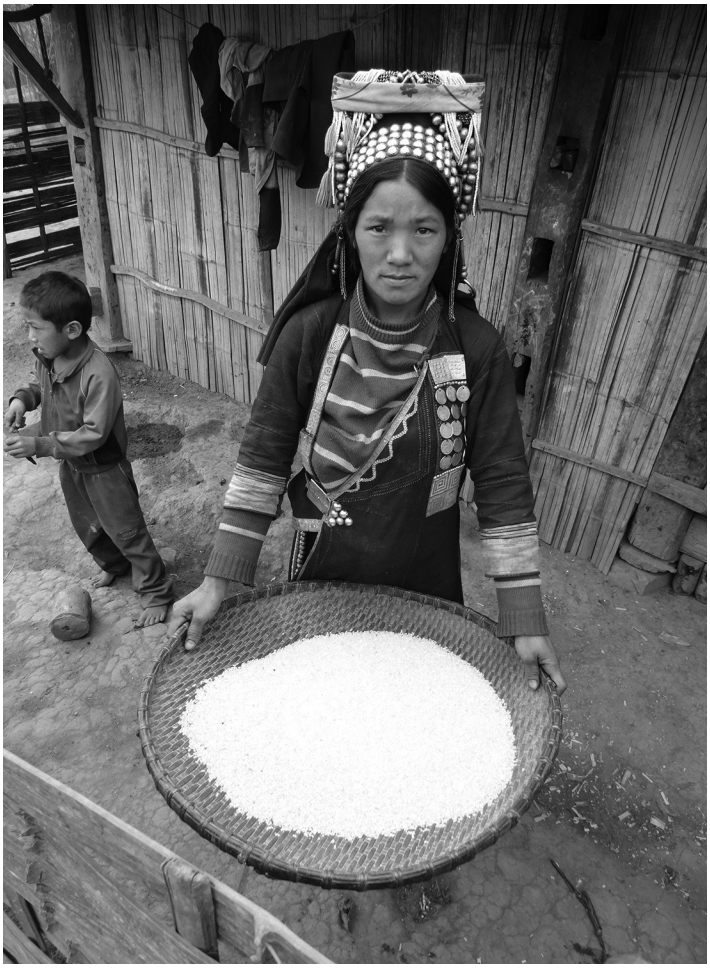
I was sure of buffalo tenderloin, but my host, the village chief, insisted on a special treat for such an important guest and served the guts and innards (a local delicacy). With plenty of rice whiskey called low-low (home brewed white lightning), which is served at every meal, and a good set of molars, it is possible to smile and make appreciative noises while you grind through the buffalo intestines.

Conditions were extremely basic in the dirt-floor thatched huts and it got very cold at night. My guide got several flea bites from the thin blankets, but I slept in my Goretex and didn't get any. The rats would keep us up as they would scurry over us as they raced around the thatch roof. One improvement that I noticed was that 30 years ago, some of the Akha had throat goitres from a lack of iodine in their diet; they traded for an inland source of iodine free salt. They now probably have access to commercial iodized salt. Also 30 years ago, the men still wore traditional embroidered indigo tunics, but now dress in ragged western style clothes or a sarong. There was a great deal more opium grown then too.

The Story of the Homemade Gun

All the family huts have homemade guns for hunting. In spite of them being propped against the door or placed near the fire, all homemade guns are loaded. It is impossible to unload a homemade gun – it can only be discharged. The guns have 2-meter long barrels and operate on a simple 19th century, cap and ball system. A charge of gunpowder is poured down the barrel followed by the bullet and a wad. A percussion cap is crimped over a nipple on which the hammer falls and ignites the main charge. One morning a man passed by my hut carrying a homemade gun and pursued by his mother, who said he was too drunk to go hunting. She wrestled with him for control of the loaded gun, while the muzzle swivelled around and everyone scattered. She eventually delivered a couple of good blows to his head and took the gun away.

This event caused a great deal of mirth in the village and was retold at the evening fire. This turned the conversation to homemade guns. I said the percussion caps had to be manufactured, but my host said everything was made here in the village and showed me his loaded gun. The safety catch was a sliver of wood between the spring-operated hammer and the cap. I could see that the cap was made from a piece of tin containing some gunpowder. I agreed it was homemade, but pointed out that you have to have



Akha woman with rice

sulphur and saltpeter for gunpowder, which must come from somewhere else, but my host insisted that it was all homemade. I was obviously unconvinced that the ingredients were not manufactured, when the chief's son poured a pile of gunpowder from his flask onto the hut floor and went to the fire for an ember. I said to my guide to tell him that this wasn't a good idea, but he torched the gunpowder. The resulting explosion and flare up didn't level the hut, but I conceded the point that homemade gunpowder does work.

The Story of the Chinese Trader

When I was walking from village to village along the steep forested terrain, I encountered an itinerant Chinese trader. He was wiry, 42 years old, wore city clothes and was always smiling. Incredibly, his home-made backpack weighed 30 kilos (his estimate), I lifted it and it may have been more. He passed me almost every day. We always seemed to be going to the same village, but he had to step it out with his staggering pack in time to get to the village, set up his stall and do some trading before it got dark. He would then leave early the next morning. His backpack was full of junk watches, batteries, ribbons, thread, hair grips and assorted plastic knick-knacks. The watches sold for US$2.50 and he had a tool on his belt to remove the back of the watch and replace the battery. People said he comes once a month, walking across the border from Yunnan in China. They said the batteries were poor quality and only lasted a month or so. The Akha have no need to tell the time, but they do like a gaudy watch, so this really isn't relevant. Bizarrely, when people had no money, but wanted a hairgrip or a ribbon, he would trade handfuls of human hair. The women have jet black, thick hair, I asked him if it was for wigs and hairpieces, he replied that it was; he would sell the hair in China, (many Akha speak Chinese and these conversations required a 3-way translation).

He was an astute businessman and on arriving at a village would hand out promotional balloons to the children, who would scream and alert the whole village to his arrival. I attended many of his trading sessions and started to do the math. Taking into account the stock expenses and the incredible amount of labour, he could barely have been making wages. I had trekked in this area 30 years ago and the whole economy was growing opium poppies; the hill-tribe people consumed a great deal in the evenings and growing and consuming opium was central to their culture. In the lowland areas opium crop eradication programs were working and the people were growing tea, coffee and medicinal herbs. But the area where I encountered the Chinese trader was 3-day walk from the nearest dirt road and there were many cleared areas growing opium. My guide said that on the few occasions that the Lao army, prodded by US DEA, come into the area, the village chief will give them something to look the other way and see only rice growing. I asked my guide to make some enquires and a kilo of raw opium sold for US$2,000 in the village. Now things started to add up, I am sure the Chinese trader was buying up bricks of raw opium from the villages and his junk watch and hairpiece business was his cover story. He would walk back across the mountains to Yunnan avoiding any border posts. I admired his strength and good humour.

The Story of the Shaman, Pigs Blood and Opium

Once, I was resting in an Akha village when my guide told me a Shaman had been brought in to cure someone who was very ill and that we could join the ceremony. As an older male it is easy for me to blend in at these male-only events. The Shaman killed two pigs and two chickens, and about 40 men were present. The shaman recited a long chant like a prayer and parts of the dead animals were placed in the roof of the house. A meal was prepared from the rest. A chicken was in the corner and would be killed by the Shaman afterwards and examined to see if the ceremony had been a success. I was invited to join the meal and sat down on the floor at a low table. I was horrified to see a bowl of the warm pig's blood placed in front of me (a local delicacy), under circumstances like this you cannot insult the host by refusing his food. Fortunately, as at all male-only events anywhere in the world, there was plenty of liquor flowing: home brew rice whiskey, which is almost pure alcohol. With copious amounts of low-low I spooned the pig's blood down and smiled with approving noises. I don't know if I found the pig's blood revolting because I knew it was recycled crap, but the reader will have to take my word for it that it was revolting. Afterwards I smoked several pipes of opium with the men to keep the pig's blood down.

2015 Leadership Recognition Contest Winners

Christine Fordham

To spark more trips on our ACCVI schedule, a “Leadership Recognition Contest” was launched for 2015. Leaders earned 1 point per trip day and ½ point for events and cancelled trips. The results were that in 2015, your club offered 298 days where you could participate in an ACCVI trip or event. 67 leaders offered trips and events on the schedule. So the real winners were ACCVI members, who had a plethora of trip choices.

Leader points were tallied at year end, and prizes were awarded at the AGM.... and the winners were:

1. George Butcher – Arcteryx Softshell Jacket (embroidered with club crest)
2. Ken Wong – $100 MEC gift Card
3. & 4. A tie:
   Martin Hofmann – $100 MEC Gift Card
   Peggy Taylor – $100 MEC Gift Card
5. Sandy Stewart – $50 MEC Gift Card
6. A tie: so the $50 MEC card prize was split between
   Jeff Beddoes – $25 MEC Gift Card
   Mike Hubbard – $25 MEC Gift Card

George Butcher models his Arcteryx jacket prize

Leader badge

Leader badges were awarded to all leaders who offered outdoor trips – the number “10” being added to those leaders’ badges with 10 trip days or more. To draw attention to the importance of turning in waivers at the end of the trip, all trips that had “waivers turned in”, were put in a hat and a draw yielded even more prizes.

These were:

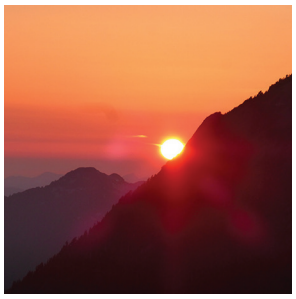
Sonia Langer – $50 MEC Gift Card

Derek Sou – $50 MEC Gift Card

Jessica Lansfield – ACC Abbot Pass Buff

Thank you to Arcteryx and MEC, who were both generous sponsors of these prizes.

The Leadership Program continues in 2016, with more great prizes, for all scheduled trips and events that have had the waivers turned into the librarian@accvi.ca

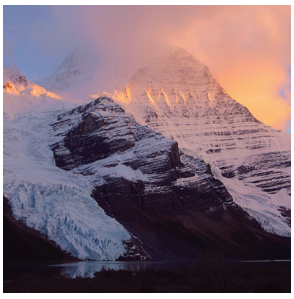






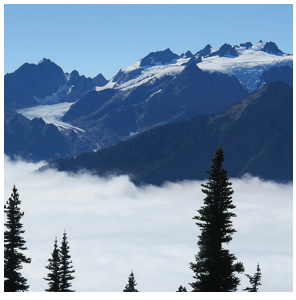
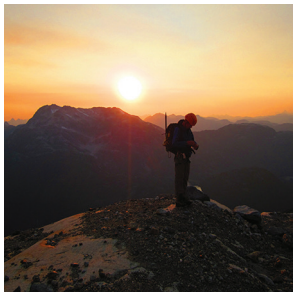








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